

Official Manga
Doujinshi Collection

NOZOMU TAMAKI



Dance in the
Wampire Bund

◆ FORGOTTEN TALES ◆

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Dance in the
Wampire Bund

FORGOTTEN TALES

SEVEN SEAS ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND

FORGOTTEN TALES

by Nozomu Tamaki, Tikurakuran, Gemma, and friends

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DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND: FORGOTTEN TALES

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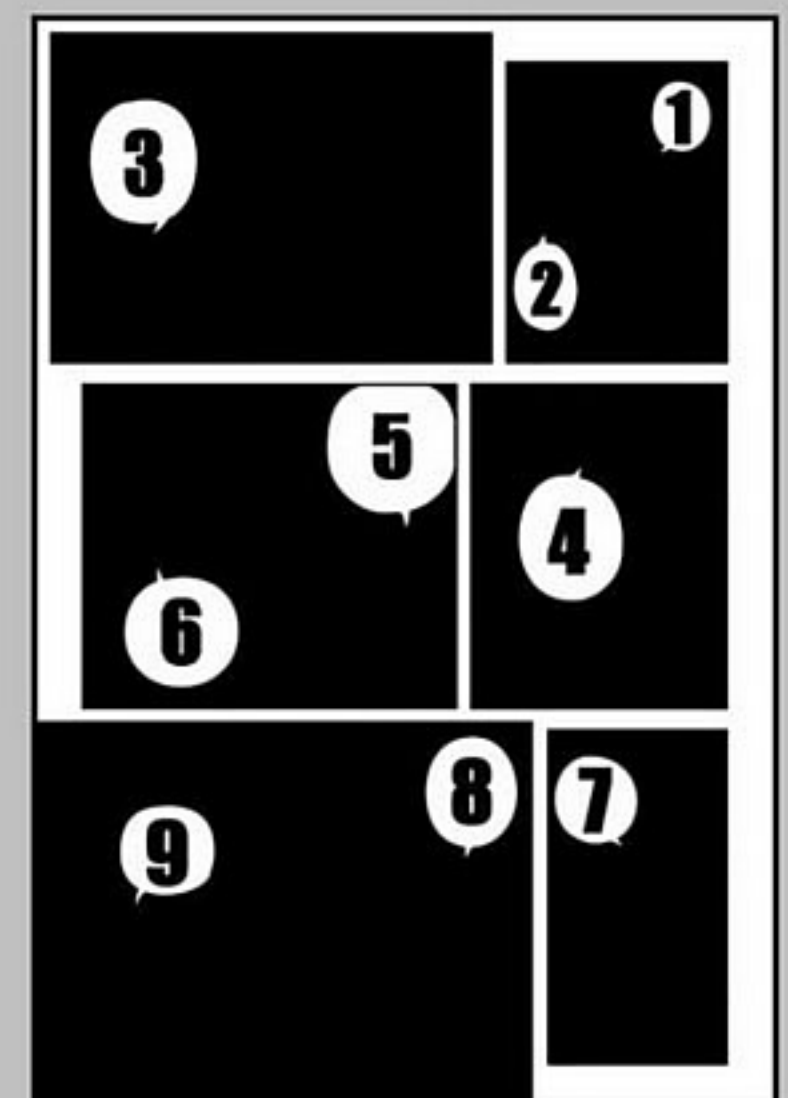
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READING DIRECTIONS

This book reads from *right to left*, Japanese style. If this is your first time reading manga, you start reading from the top right panel on each page and take it from there. If you get lost, just follow the numbered diagram here. It may seem backwards at first, but you'll get the hang of it! Have fun!!



FOREWORD

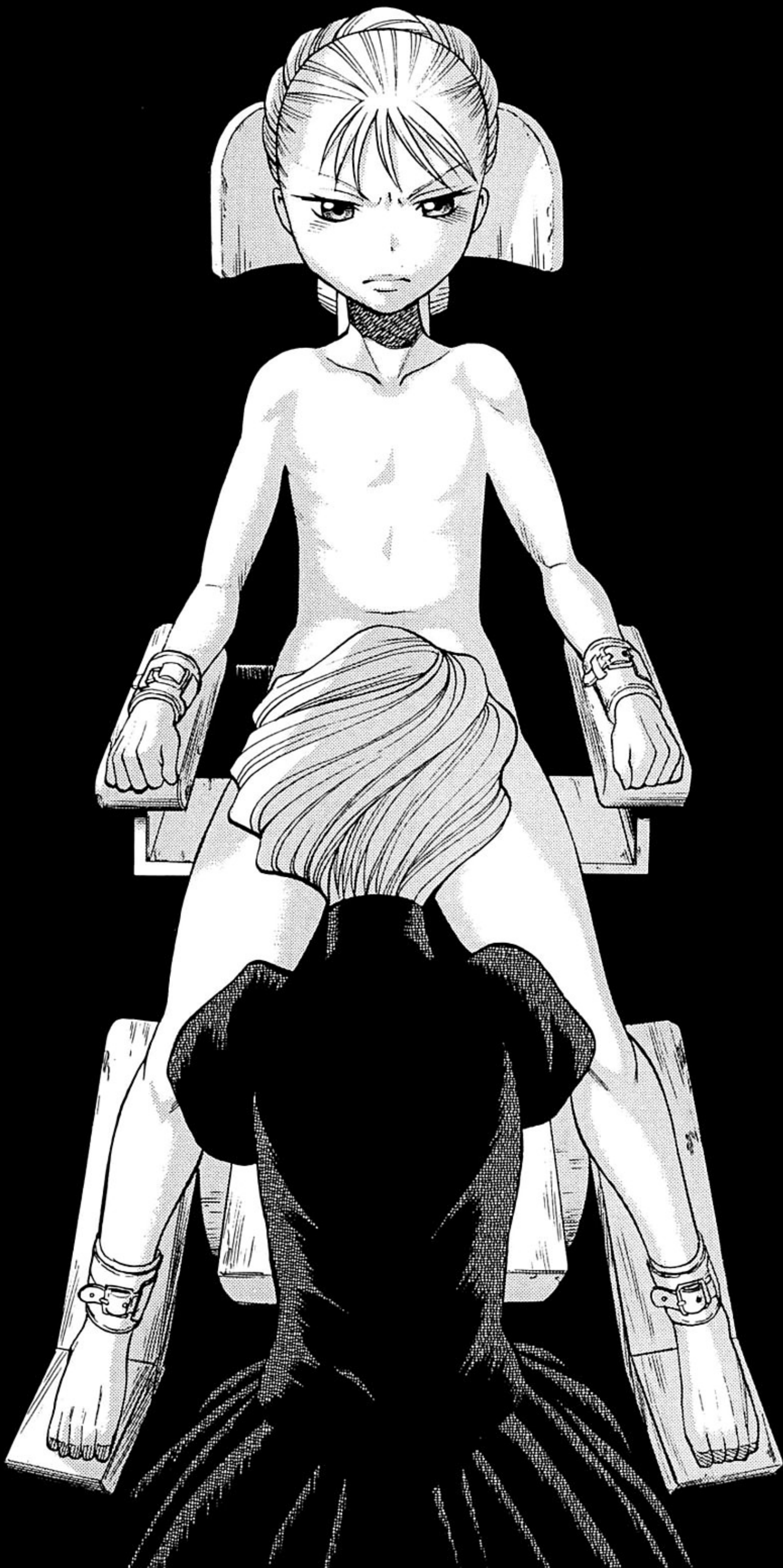
When I first read *Dance in the Vampire Bund*, I knew it was something special, something unique. It's a series that pulled together all the best elements from the various vampire and werewolf mythos past and present—everything from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to *Dog Soldiers*—and built a fully-formed, instantly compelling world that continues to enthrall me the more I read. Where HBO's *True Blood* only gave hints of the inner workings of vampire society, *Dance in the Vampire Bund* threw you right into the thick of things from the very first chapter, as Princess Mina Tepes, alongside her werewolf bodyguard Akira, revealed the existence of vampires to the world in an explosive news conference.

Dance in the Vampire Bund is a manga series that spans fourteen volumes, plus a two volume side story called *Dive in the Vampire Bund*, a three-volume midquel, *Dance in the Vampire Bund: The Memories of Sledgehammer*, and the upcoming manga sequel series set twenty-years in the future called *Dance in the Vampire Bund II: Scarlet Order*. You might think that's all the *Bund* saga had to offer. But no, I was absolutely floored with otaku delight when I learned of the existence of ten very rare *Dance in the Vampire Bund doujinshi* that were self-published by author Nozomu Tamaki for Japan's Comiket conventions between 2009 and 2012. These *doujinshi* weren't your typical fan comics; they were ten official—completely canon—collections that featured manga drawn by Nozomu Tamaki that expanded on many of the most memorable chapters of the series. And not just that, the *doujinshi* were packed with fascinating short stories that featured the first appearances of *Bund* mainstay characters like baby vampire Harvey and vampire dentist Doctor Saji.

And so, at my ravenous fanboy urging, Seven Seas publisher Jason DeAngelis set about trying to license these *doujinshi*. It was a long, long road, since as far as we knew, a *doujinshi* had never been acquired by a U.S. publisher before, so it wasn't your typical rights deal. But after a lot of wrangling, we finally got the green light from Japan! I'm so thrilled to finally be able to present this previously convention-exclusive material to you in two collections. The book you hold in your hands, *Dance in the Vampire Bund: Forgotten Tales*, is the manga collection (which also gives you a taste of a long short story at the end). Next to come is the novel collection *Dance in the Vampire Bund: Secret Chronicles*. I hope you enjoy delving deeper into the *Bund* universe than you ever thought possible.

Seven Seas Managing Editor,
ADAM ARNOLD

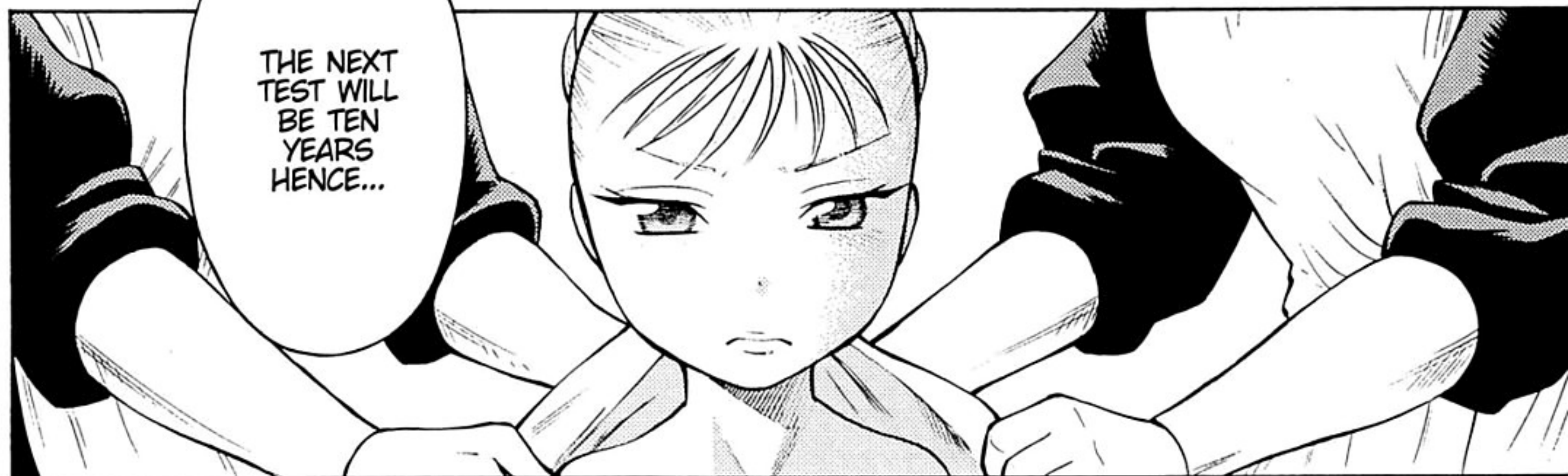
Dance in the
Vampire Bund



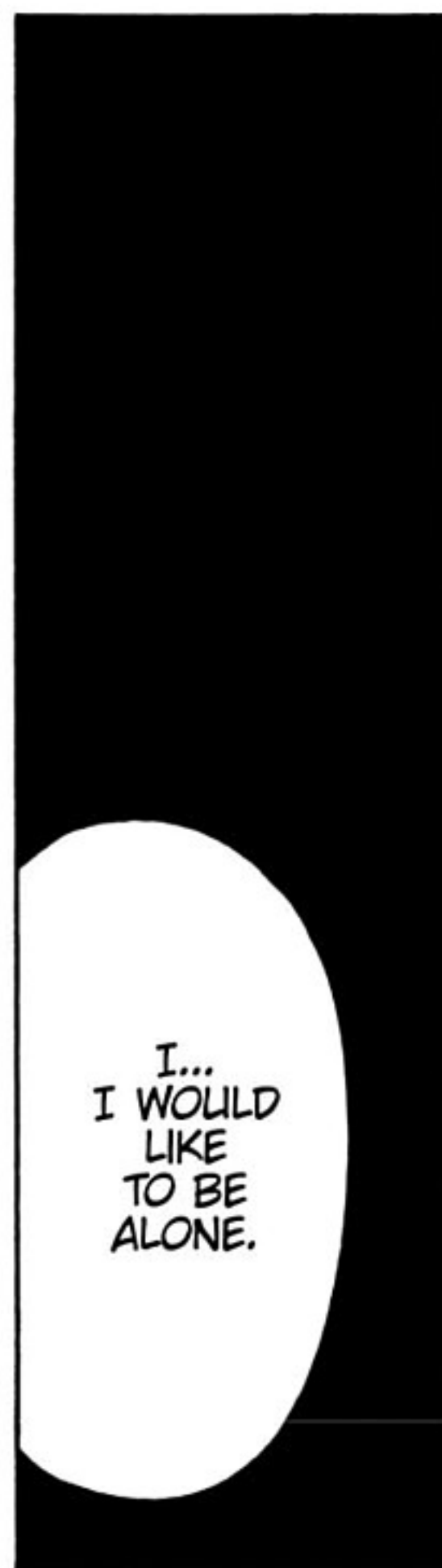


YOUR
MAJESTY'S
CHASTITY
HAS BEEN
VERIFIED.

QUEEN
MINA.



THE NEXT
TEST WILL
BE TEN
YEARS
HENCE...



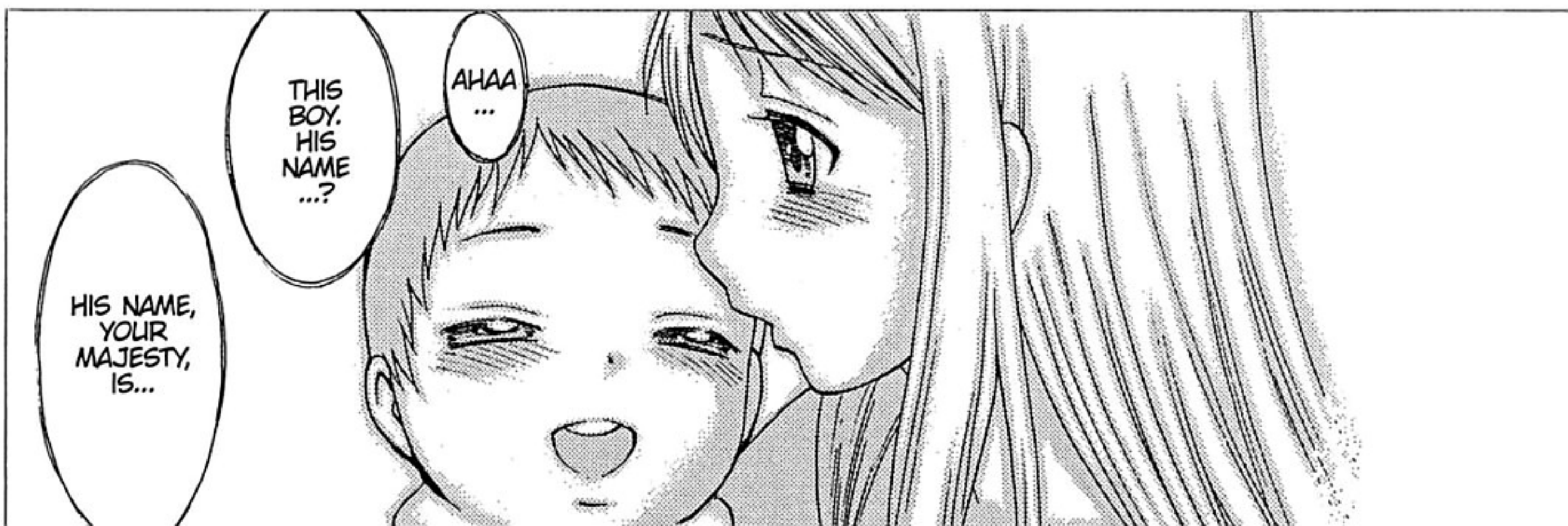
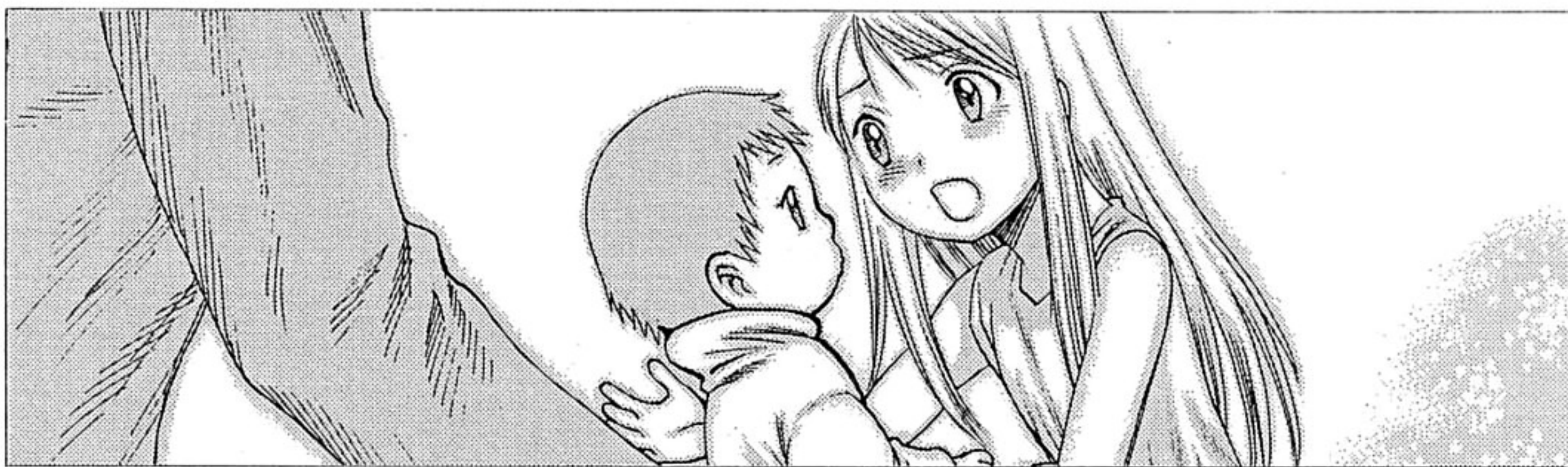
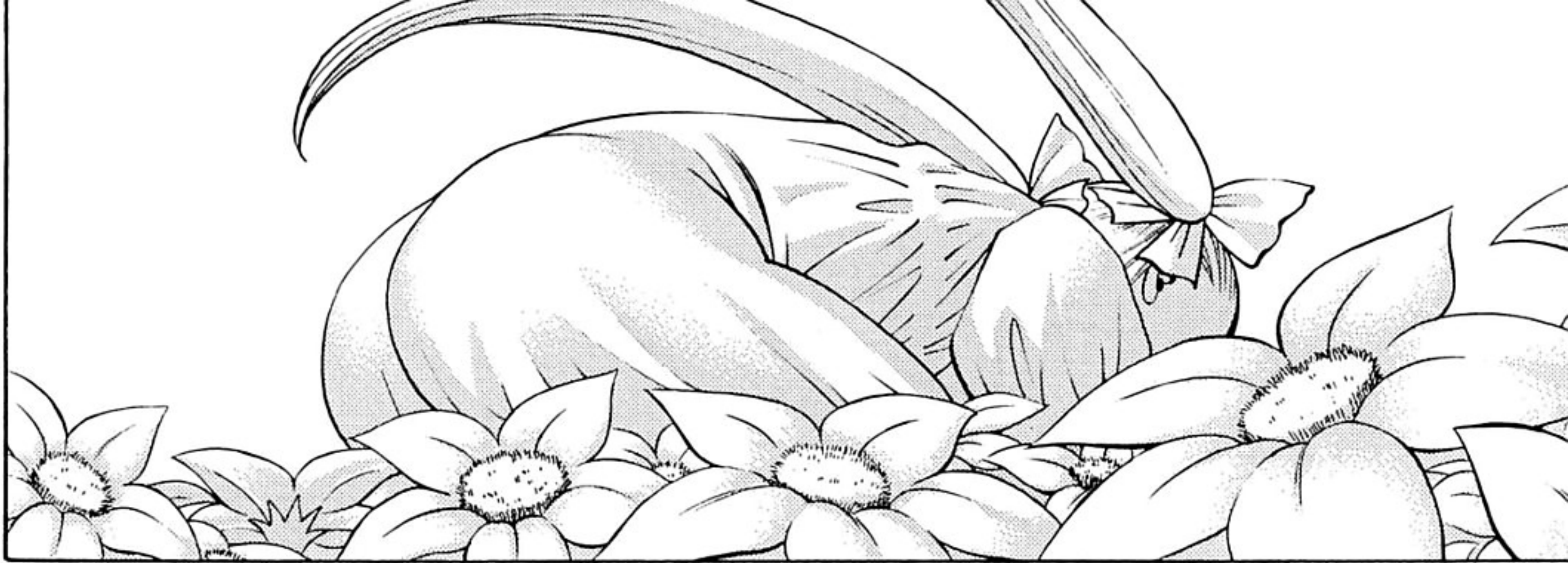
I...
I WOULD
LIKE
TO BE
ALONE.

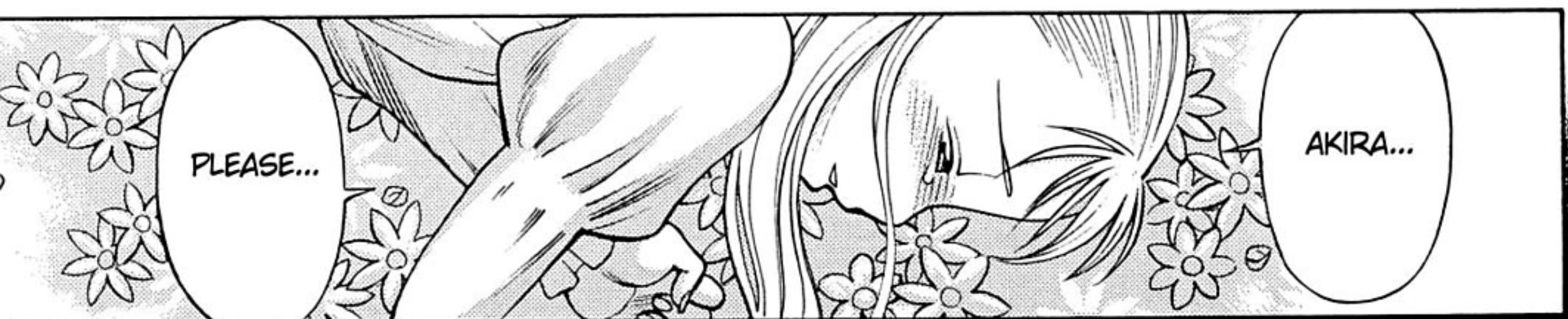
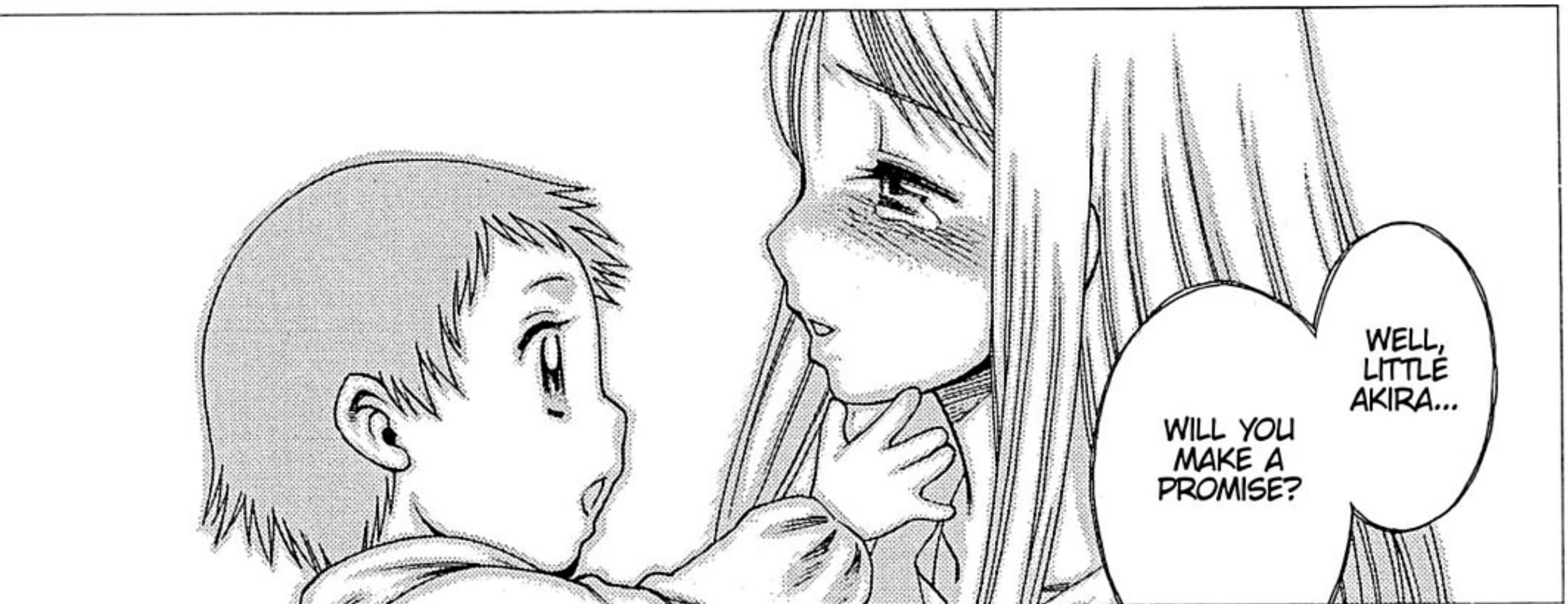


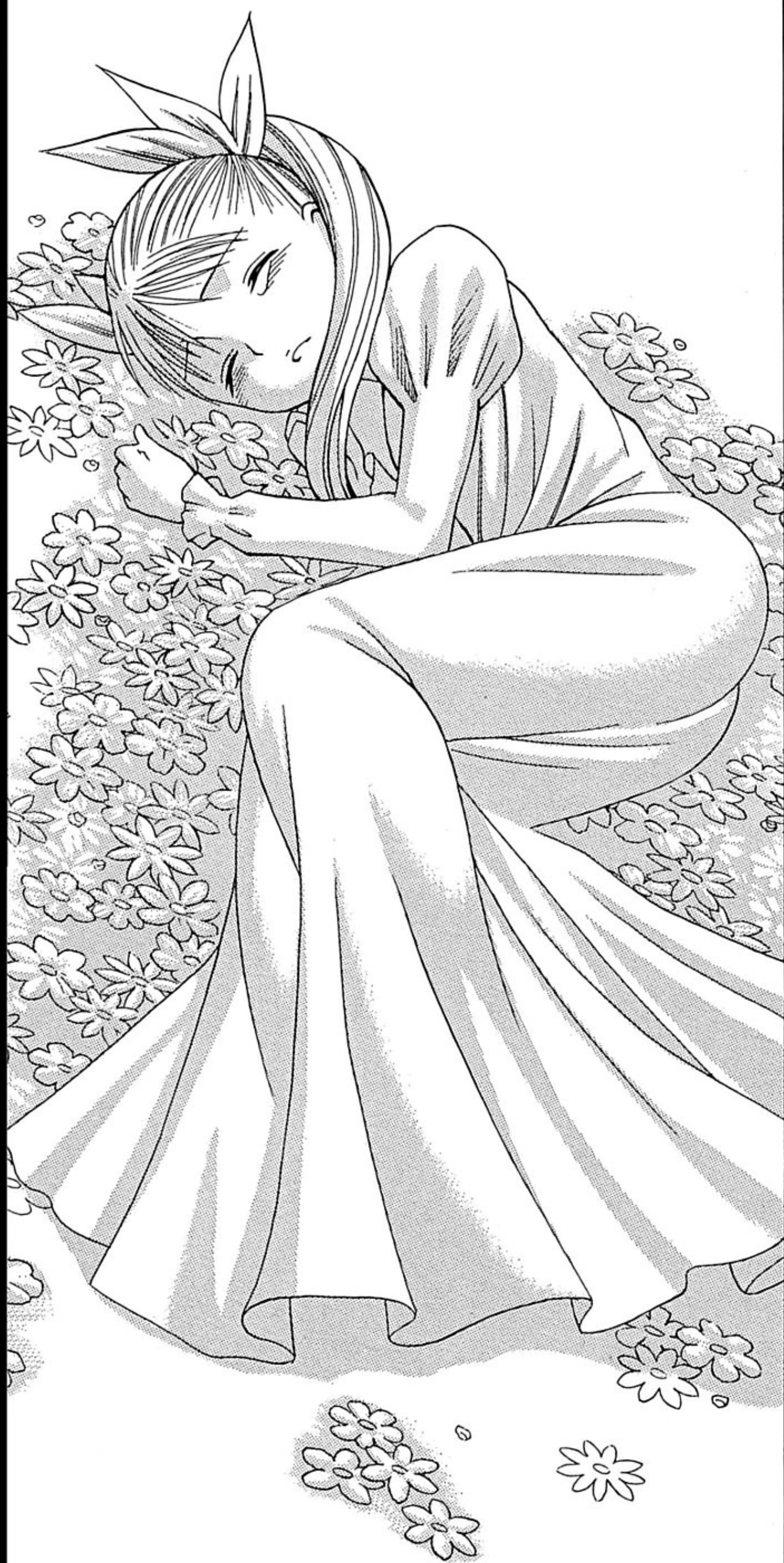
I'M
SORRY.











DOES
YOUR
TUMMY
HURT?

HEY...
WHAT'S
THE
MATTER?

TIME TO COME.

Secrets from the mouth of Nozomu Tamaki-sensei himself.
Knowing them won't change much, but they are still interesting,
hidden facets of the world.

灰暗いクレイドルの底から

From the Depths of the Dark Cradle

—Though all of these trivia bits are going to be explained in the story eventually, anyway.
(From Tamaki-sensei.)

The time it takes for a human bitten by a vampire to change completely into a vampire is approximately **72 hours**. It is thought that this is where the legend of a vampire stalking its prey for three nights comes from.

Vaccines and other methods of preventing the transformation are effective only within the **first 48 hours** after the bite. Beyond that point, there is no way to stop the person from becoming a vampire. The 24 hours from the point of no return to full transformation are called the “**Twilight Hours**.” At this point, some of the afflicted choose to end their lives. Others use this time to say their final farewells and to settle affairs from their human life.

The artificial blood “STIGMA” was originally created as a food source for vampires. However, because of its compatibility with all blood types, it is used across the world as a “universal blood” for transfusion. The world-spanning biochemical mega-corporation “**Lorenzo**” is the pharmaceutical company which manufactures the artificial blood, and one of the public faces of House Tepes. When the Bund was created, the firm moved its main office and production facility to the Special District. The **massive tax revenue** Lorenzo generates for the Japanese government is one of the reasons they agreed to the Bund's leasing arrangement.

The male/female ratio of werewolves is **1000/1**. Basically, there are only **male werewolves**. Accordingly, werewolves take human females to wife and have them bear their children. The male/female birth rate is similar to that of humans, but the incidence of female babies inheriting the lycanthropy gene is so rare as to be nonexistent. It is said the reason for this is that ancient vampires tampered with werewolf genes so as to curb their explosive population growth.

Once the daughters of werewolves grow to adulthood, most become the wives of other werewolves. Born and raised in werewolf society, they understand werewolf men like no others. **Akira's mother** is, of course, human. A 36-year-old Japanese woman, she is not from a werewolf family.

The average lifespan of a werewolf is **150~200 years**. However, most die in battle or by other violent means before reaching old age. Wolfgang, Duke Scott, and the other members of the Earth Senate have all been alive since before the revolt of the Three Great Clans, but that is because they received the "**Rose Kiss**" from the previous ruler, Queen Lucrezia.

Hime-sama is about **400 years old**. However, that is only an **estimate**. On a side note, the three vampire children's ages are as follows: Anna is about 25, while Jiji and Clara are 3~4 years older than they appear. They are not, in fact, all that old.

Vera's true name is Veratus Carmencita Lagash. Born a gypsy (Romani), she was caught in a witch-hunt. Before she could be burned at the stake, she was rescued by Queen Lucrezia. Becoming a vampire, she was employed as Lucrezia's maid. That makes her the **predecessor** to Nelly, Nella, and Nero. Vera is held in high regard by everyone in Mina-hime's current maid corps.

The official language of the Vampire Bund is **Latin**. Even the BL stories that Yuki writes are translated by Mina-hime into Latin, and from there distributed into vampire society.

Convinced by Yuki, Akira did join the **Literature Club** at school. He is actually rather erudite, in that he enjoys traditional Japanese poetry, such as tanka and haiku. His talent for writing them, however, is questionable.

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

MY MOTHER
WAS LYING
IN A PUDDLE
OF BLOOD,
GROWING
COLD.
I CLUNG
TO HER,
CRYING.

THAT...

IS MY
OLDEST
MEMORY.





THEY MAY NOW BE EXTINCT, BUT IT IS SAID THEIR INDIVIDUAL FIGHTING PROWESS SURPASSED EVEN THAT OF WEREWOLVES.

NOT PARTICULARLY. IT WAS A WERETIGER, AFTER ALL.

THAT WAS A TOUCH MORE DIFFICULT THAN EXPECTED.



AS A RACE, THEY ARE TOO HISTORICALLY RECENT TO BE NAMED *LIVING FOSSILS*. HOWEVER, THEY ARE STILL AN IMPORTANT MISSING LINK IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE BEAST-MEN RACES.

A PITY... I HAD HOPED TO CAPTURE BOTH THE MOTHER AND THE OFFSPRING ALIVE.



OH, NO, NO.

IF SO, WE COULD TURN IT LOOSE FOR A QUICK HUNT...

WOULD YOU LIKE TO USE IT AS A SAMPLE FOR DISSECTION?

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE OFF-SPRING?



THE OFF-SPRING, HOWEVER, IS A LIVING FEMALE. I THINK I MAY RAISE IT TO MATURITY... FOR BREEDING.

THE MOTHER'S CARCASS SHOULD SUFFICE FOR THAT PURPOSE.

PLEASE, NAME IT FOR WHAT IT IS-- A MAD WHIMSY! HA HA HA HA!

NOW THAT IS AN INTERESTING HOBBY!

OHO! BREEDING WERETIGERS, IS IT?



EAT.

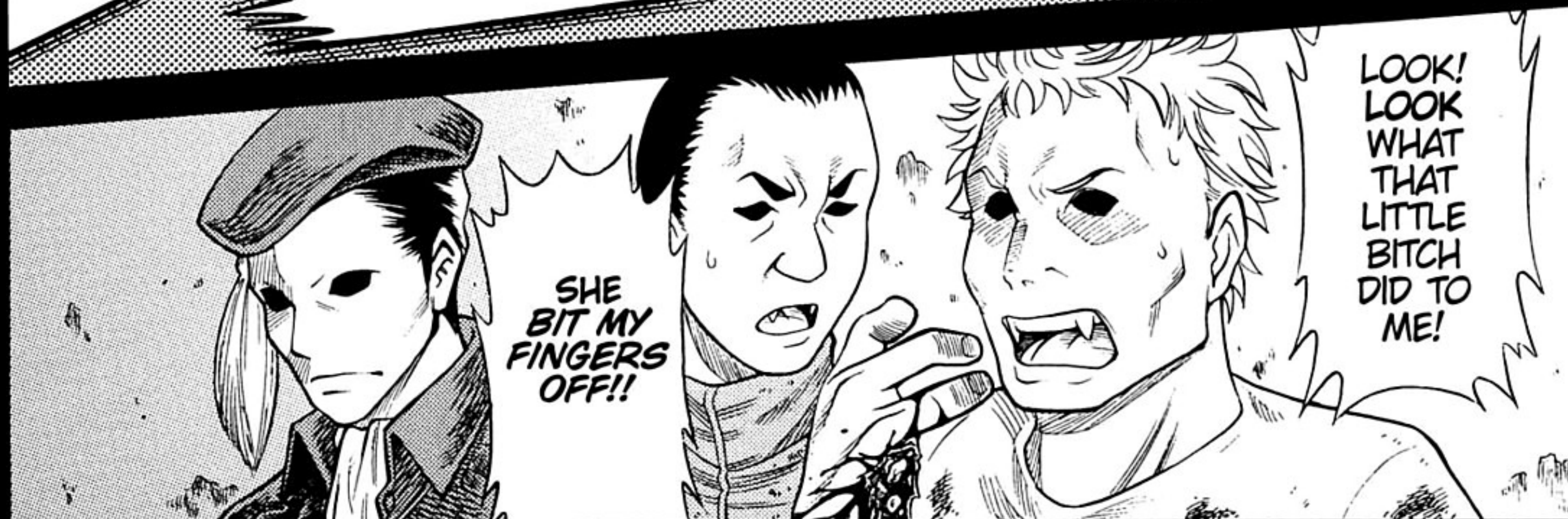
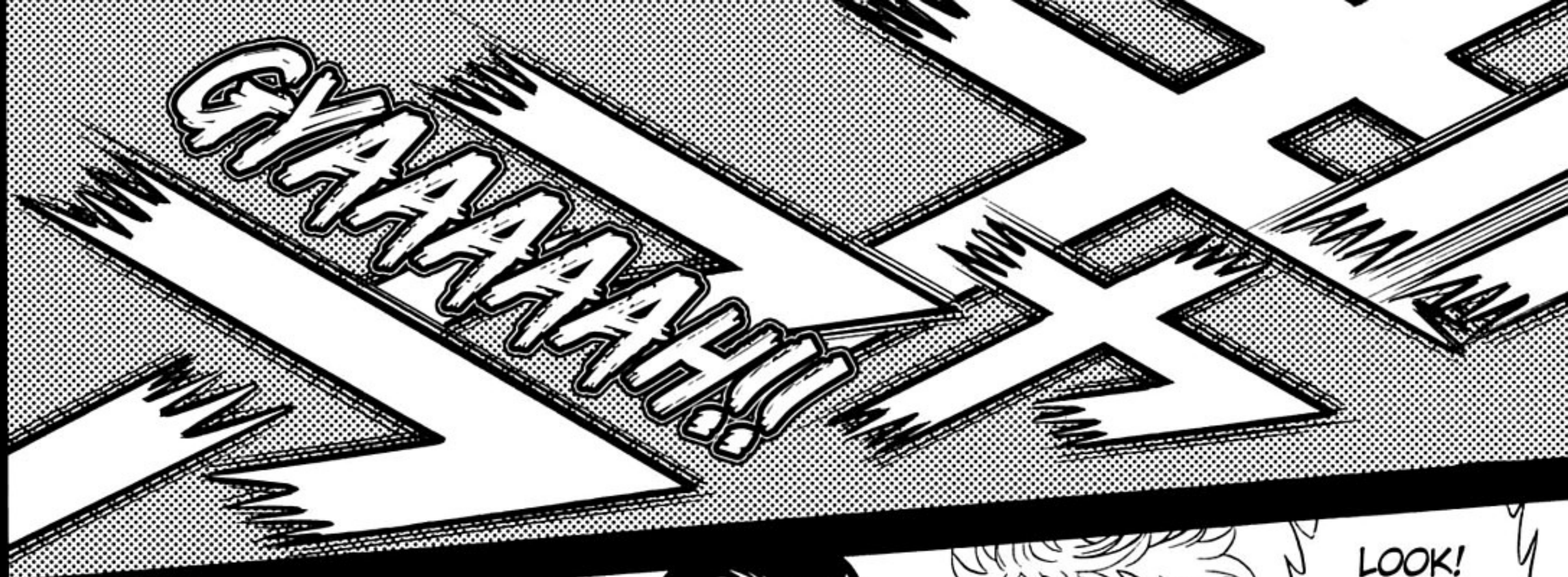
I ONLY
REALLY
UNDERSTOOD
ONE THING...

I DIDN'T GET
WHAT THE
MEN WITH
FANGS WERE
TALKING
ABOUT
AT ALL.



THAT
I WAS
NOW
COM-
PLETELY
AND
LITTERLY
ALONE.





SHE
BIT MY
FINGERS
OFF!!

LOOK!
LOOK
WHAT
THAT
LITTLE
BITCH
DID TO
ME!



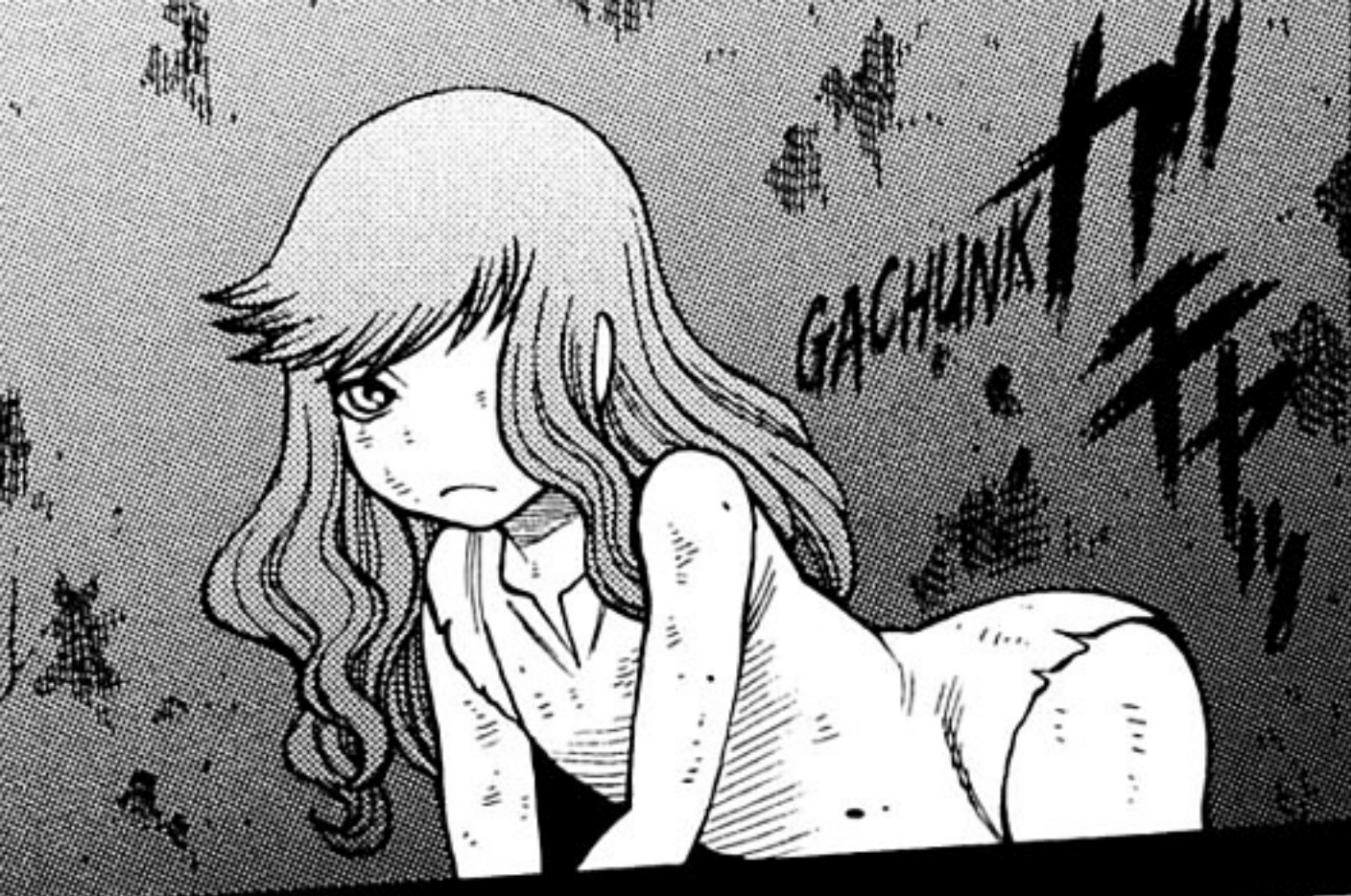
THAT IS WHAT
HAPPENS WHEN
YOU MAKE
IMPRUDENT
ATTEMPTS
TO MEDDLE
WITH IT!

FOOL!
IT MAY BE
YOUNG,
BUT IT IS
STILL A
WERETIGER.



THAT
LITTLE
BITCH
!!

D
A
M
M
I
T
!!

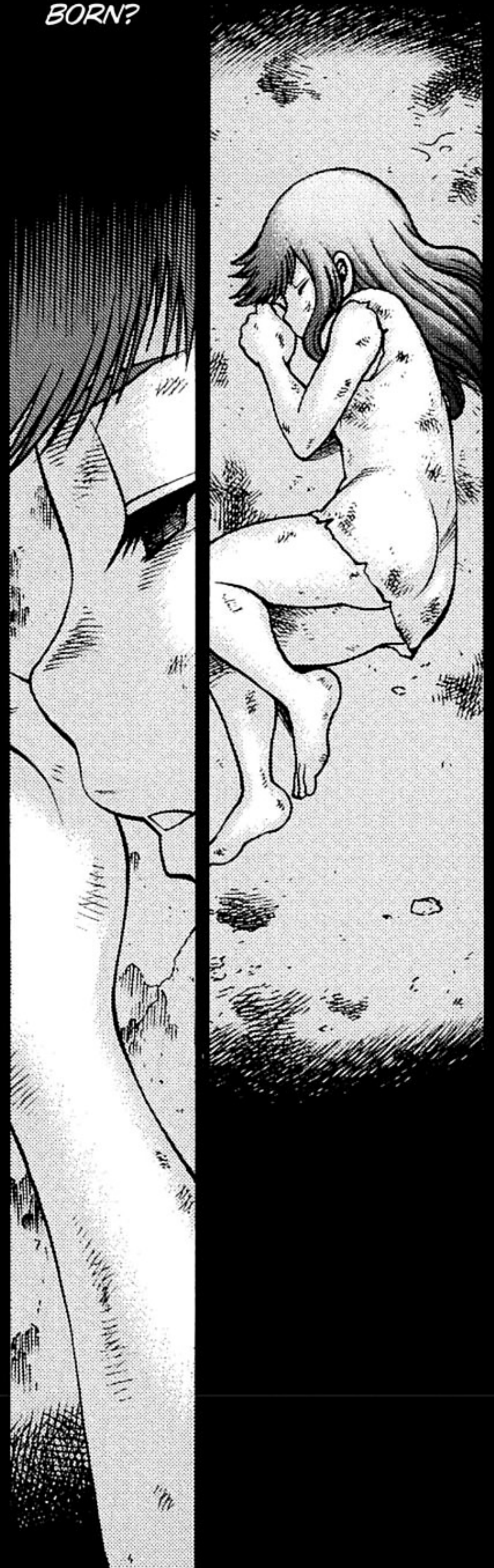


WHY
WAS I
BORN?

IN THE
PITCH-BLACK
OF MY CELL,
MY HEART
BEGAN TO FADE
INTO NUMB
WHITENESS.



WHAT
POINT
WAS
THERE
TO
LIVING?



SO I
WENT AND
PICKED
OUT A
SUITABLE
GROOM
FOR YA!
HA HA!

THE
MASTER
WANTS
TO GET
YOU WITH
CHILD,
BITCH...

YOU MAY ONLY
BE HALF-TIGER,
BUT YOU STILL
SMELL LIKE A
FEMALE TA HIM!
LOOKS LIKE HE'S
IN THE MOOD
ALREADY, TOO!

GRR
RR
RR

AND
LOOKIE
HERE
...!

GET
'ER!!

WOOSH





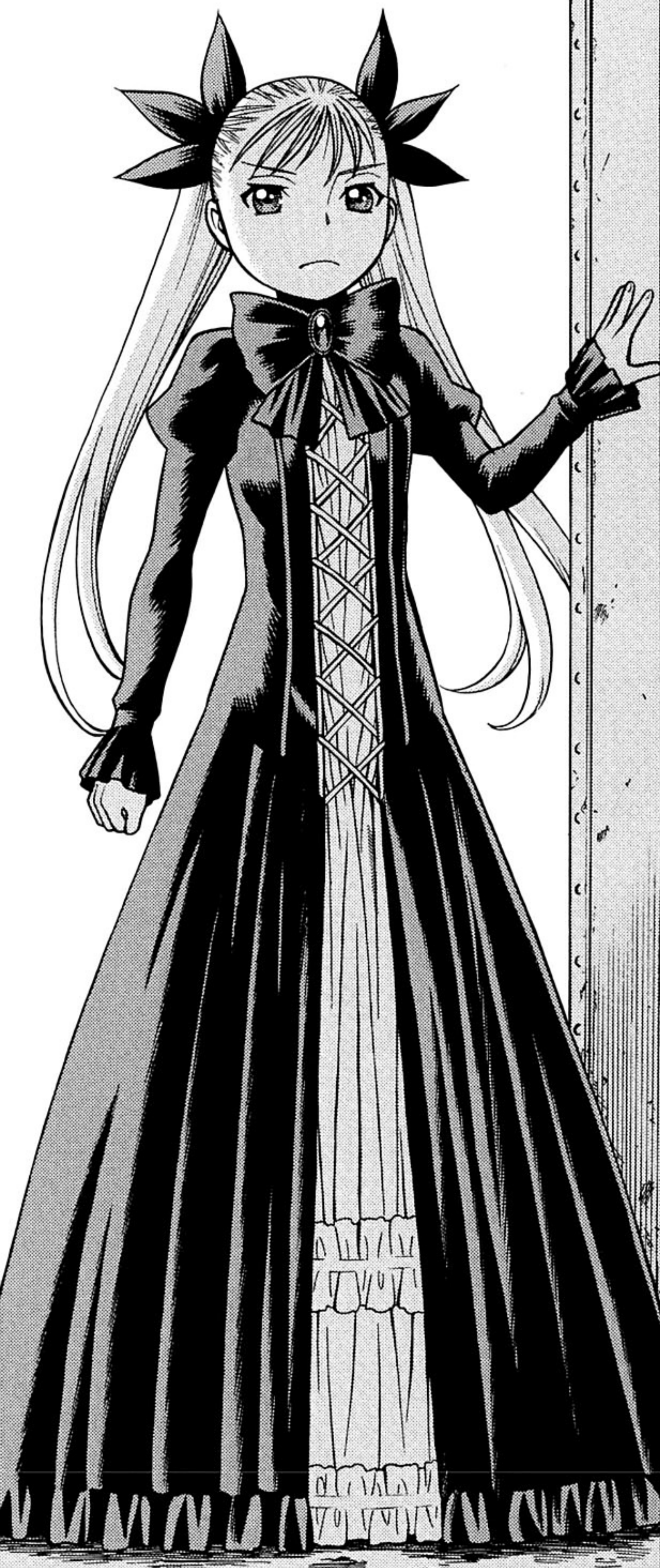
NOW I
WAS
TRULY
ALONE.

NO ONE
EVER GOT
CLOSE TO
ME AFTER
THAT.



ALONE
IN ALL
SENSES
OF THE
WORD...





BOOOOM



BO-
BOOOM BRAT-
TAT-
TAT

WHOOOM





COME OUT,
LITTLE
KITTEN.



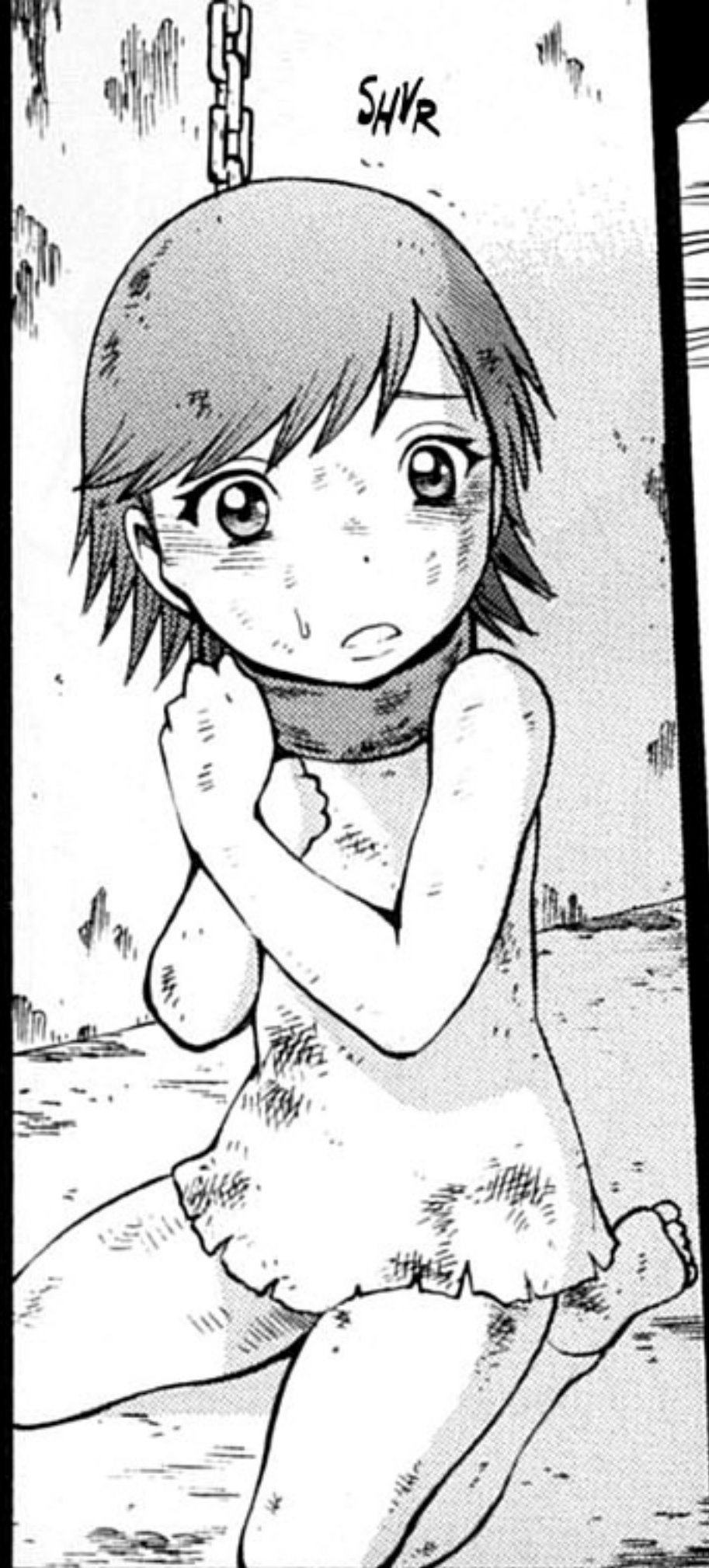
COME NOW,
THERE IS
NOTHING
TO FEAR.

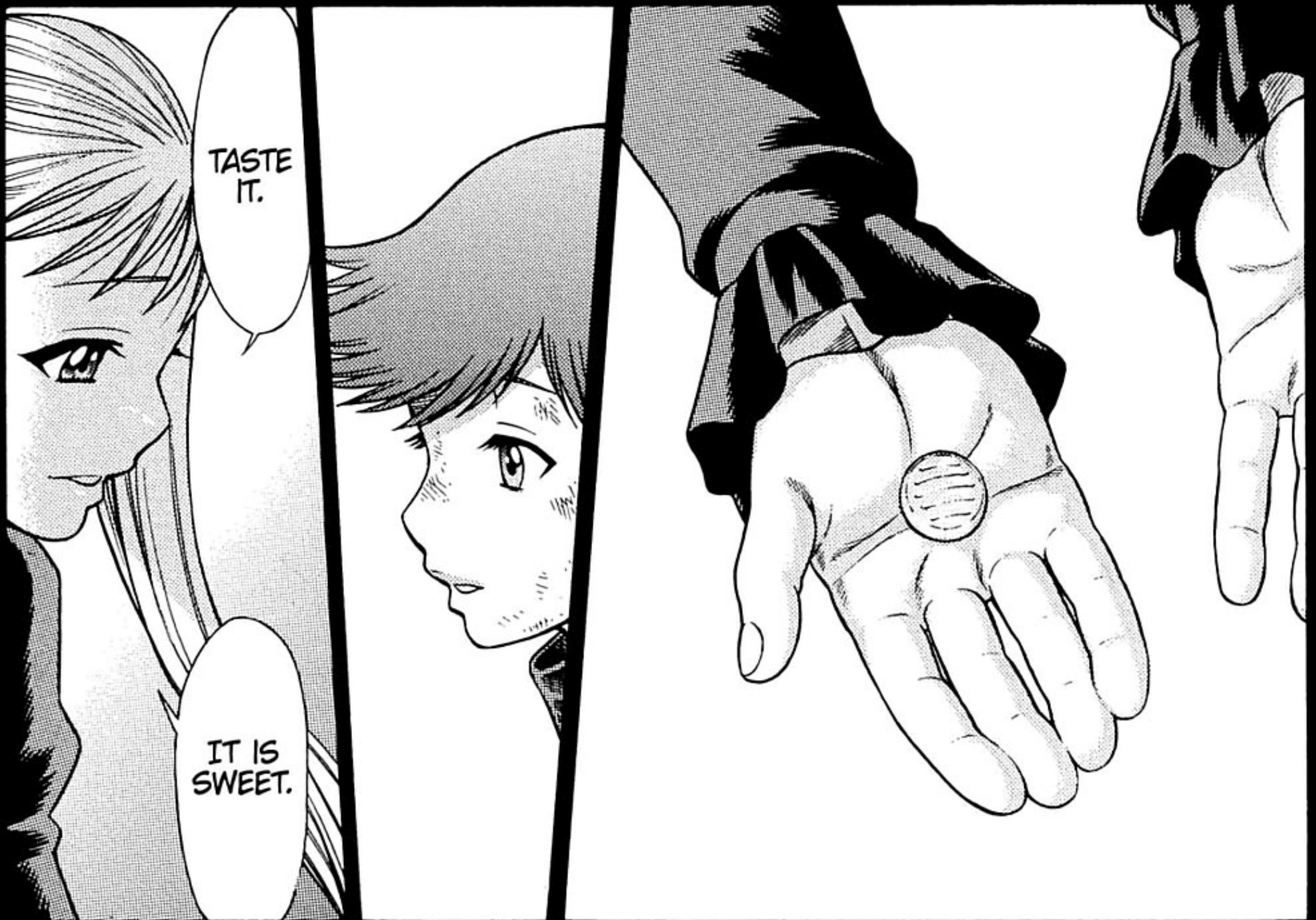
WHAT
IS
WRONG?



SLASH

RAWR!!







HEE
HEE...

GOOD
GIRL...

HOW
CUTE
YOU
ARE.



MEI
REN.



COME...





MEI...

THAT
IS
YOUR
NAME.

THAT...

WAS
THE DAY
MY LIFE
BEGAN.

REN...

ISN'T
IT
PRETTY?

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

MEMORY NO.3670 RELOAD





SEE...? DOESN'T IT MAKE ME LOOK ALL SEXY?

TAKE ALL THE TIME YOU WANT!



WELL...? WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY NEW BIKINI?

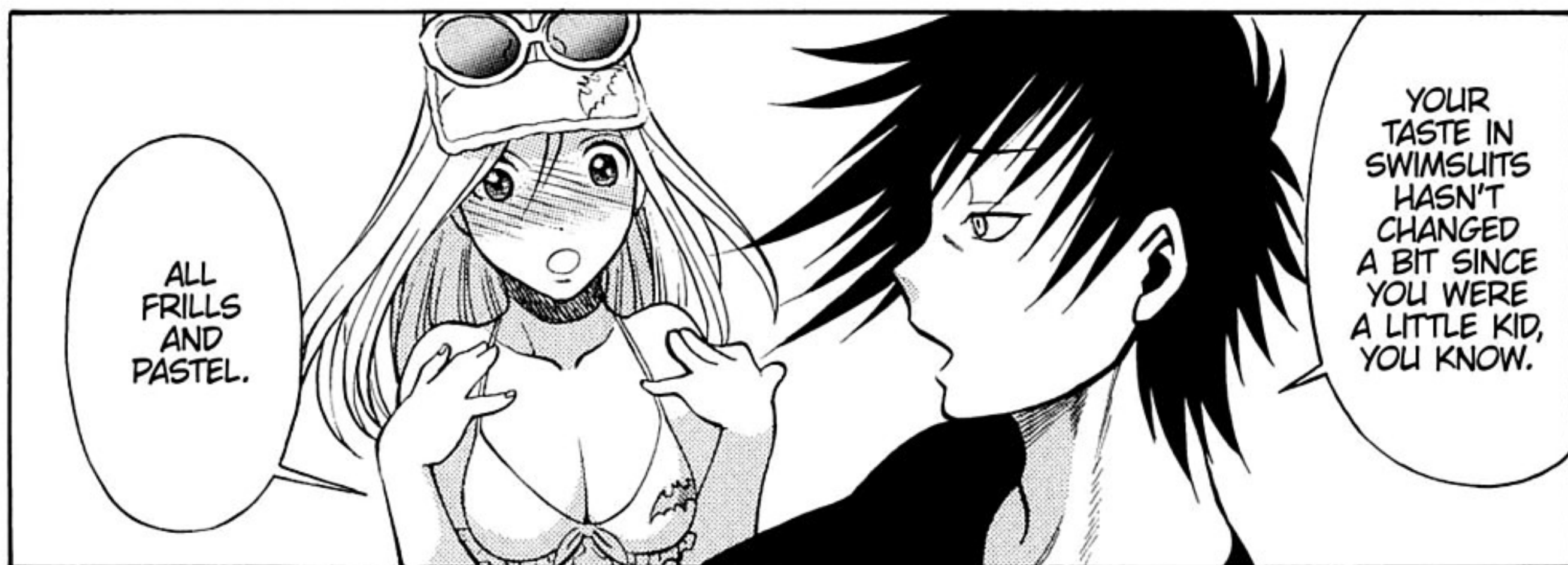
TA-DA!

I BET IT DOES.

DOES IT JUST MAKE YOU WANT TO GO TO THE BEACH?

OOOH, I KNOW IT DOES.

MINA.



ALL
FRILLS
AND
PASTEL.

YOUR
TASTE IN
SWIMSUITS
HASN'T
CHANGED
A BIT SINCE
YOU WERE
A LITTLE KID,
YOU KNOW.



IT WAS A
ONE-PIECE
SLINGSHOT,
WITH A REAL
DARING DIVE
NECKLINE.
NOW THAT
WAS A--



NNNGH...



DID YOU
SEE THE
SWIMSLUIT
VERA-SAN
WORE
LAST
YEAR?



LIKE,
THAT
YOU'VE
GOT
SOME
TESTS
COMING
UP...

MAYBE
EVEN
EN-
TRANCE
EXAMS.

BUT
ANYWAY,
AREN'T
YOU FOR-
GETTING
SOME-
THING?



LIKE I
CAN
TRUST
THAT
FROM YOU,
MISS
PROCRASTINATOR!

PLEE-
EASE~?
I'LL
START
STUDYING
TOMOR-
ROW!



AWW,
WHAT
DOES
ONE DAY
MATTER?

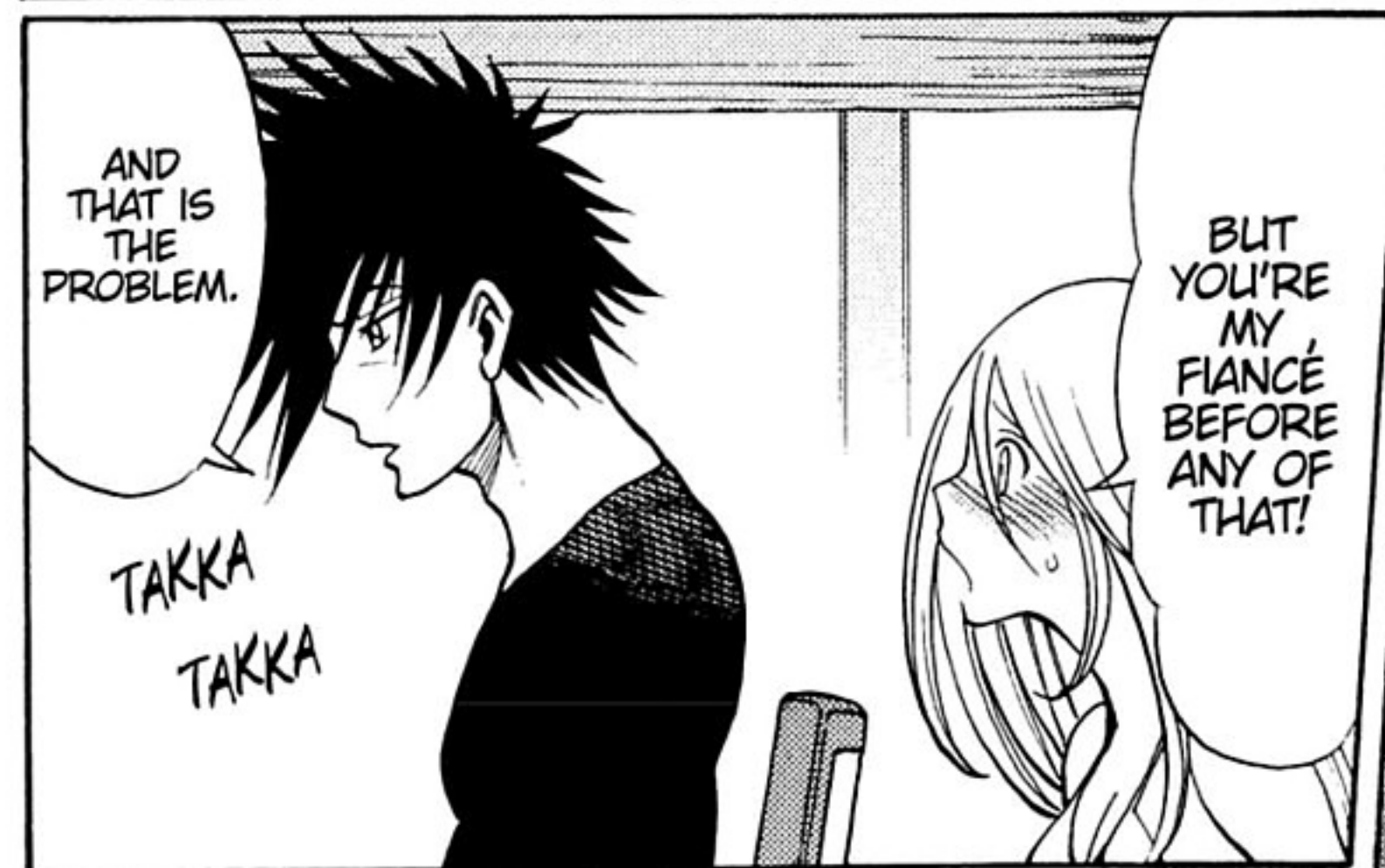
CAN'T WE
SPEND
JUST
ONE DAY
HANGING
OUT?

YOU'VE
BEEN DOING
NOTHING BUT
HANGING OUT
AND FOOLING
AROUND
SINCE
VACATION
STARTED!



AND I'M
YOUR
HOMEROOM
TEACHER.

BECAUSE
I AM
GROWN-
UP...



AND
THAT IS
THE
PROBLEM.

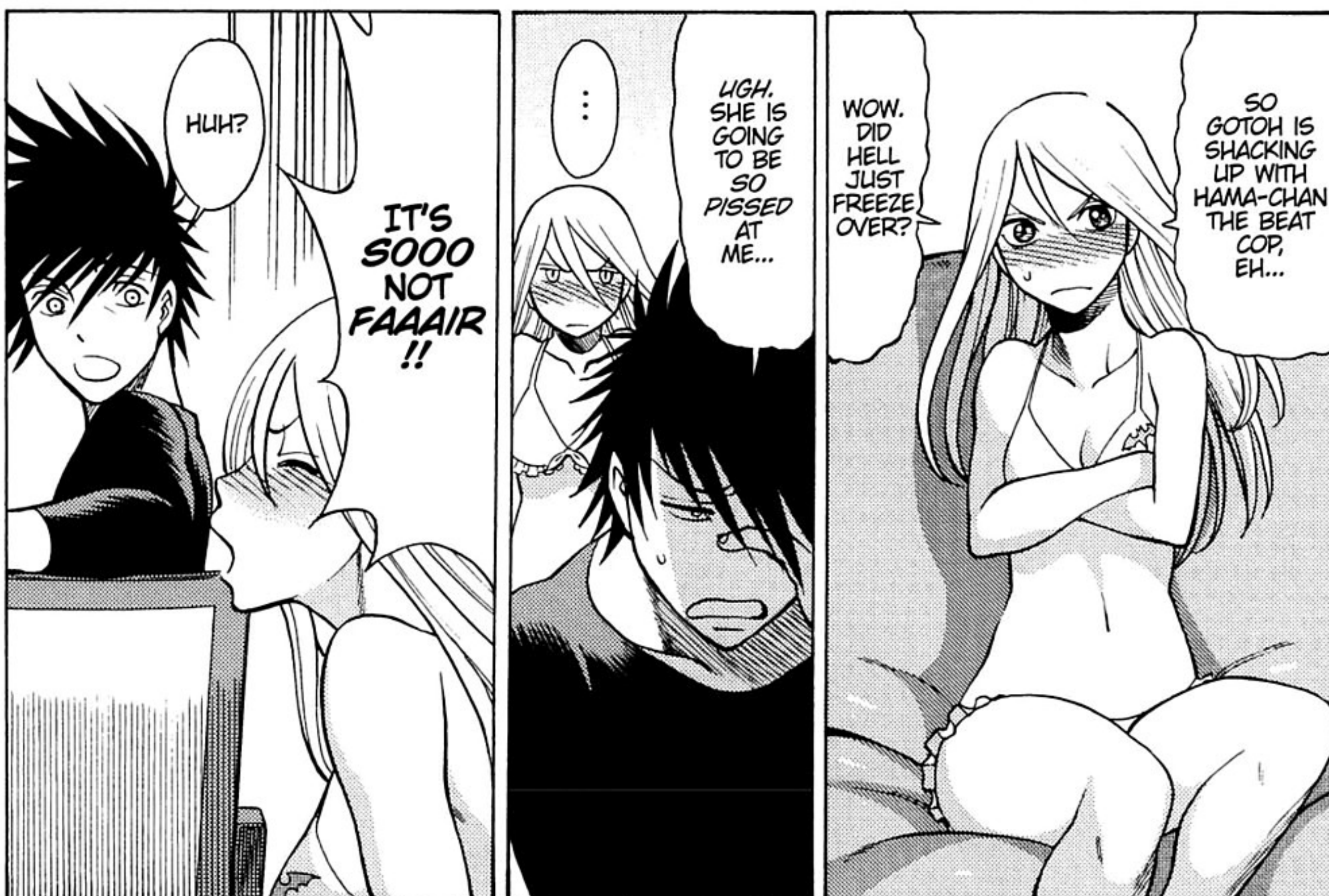
TAKKA
TAKKA

BUT
YOU'RE
MY
FIANCE'
BEFORE
ANY OF
THAT!



HMPH!
MEANIE.

WHY DO
YOU ALWAYS
HAVE TO
ACT ALL
GROWN-UP
AND
RESPONSIBLE
ALL OF THE
TIME?





YOU'VE
GOT
TESTS TO
STUDY
FOR...

DON'T
YOU WANT
TO MAKE
OUT WITH
ME,
AKIRA?



I
WANNA!
I
WANNA!
I
WANNA
!!

I WANNA
MAKE
OUT LIKE
GROWN-
UPS DO!



...



THINK
ABOUT
HOW I
FEEL
FOR A
MINUTE,
YOU
BLOCK-
HEAD!!

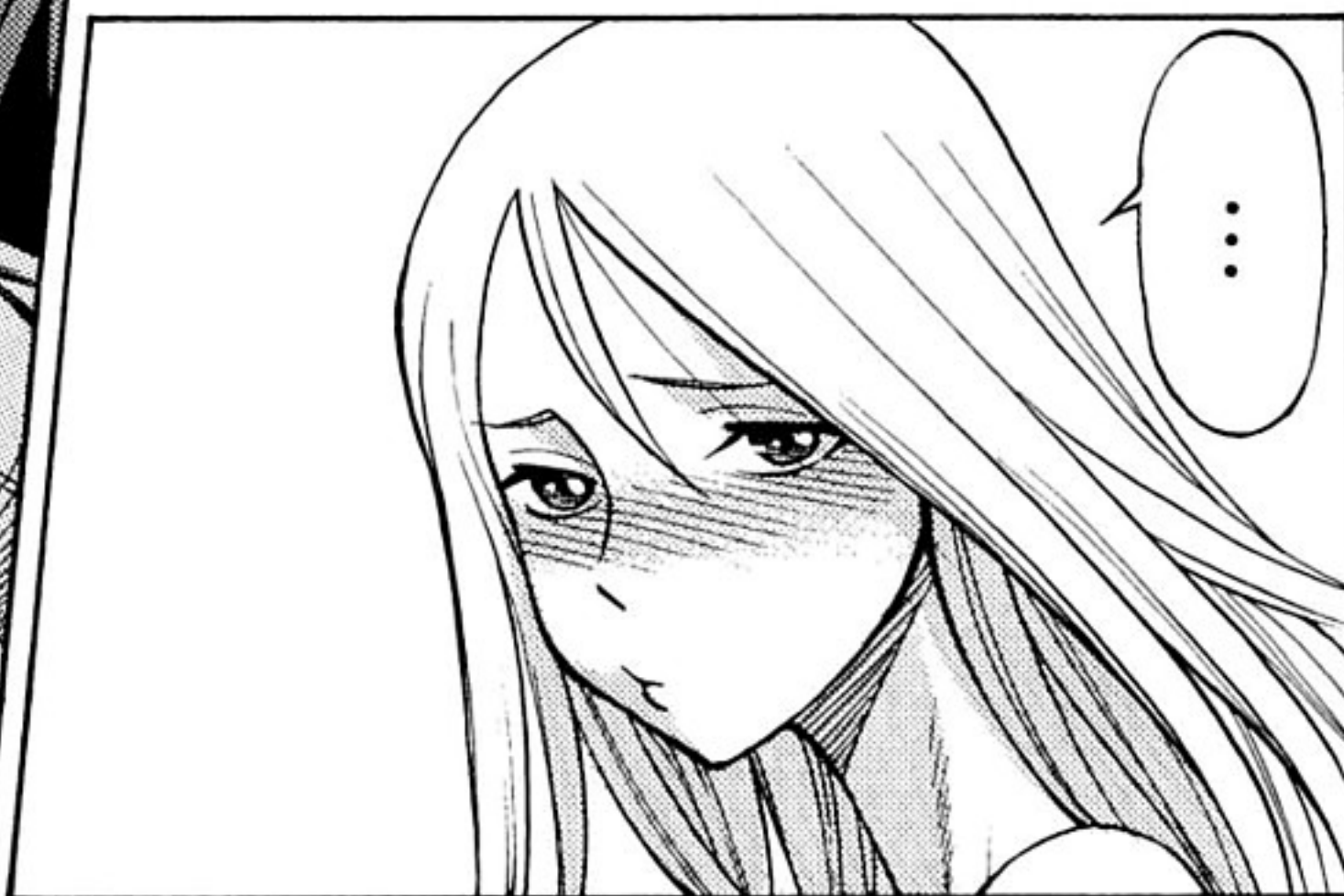
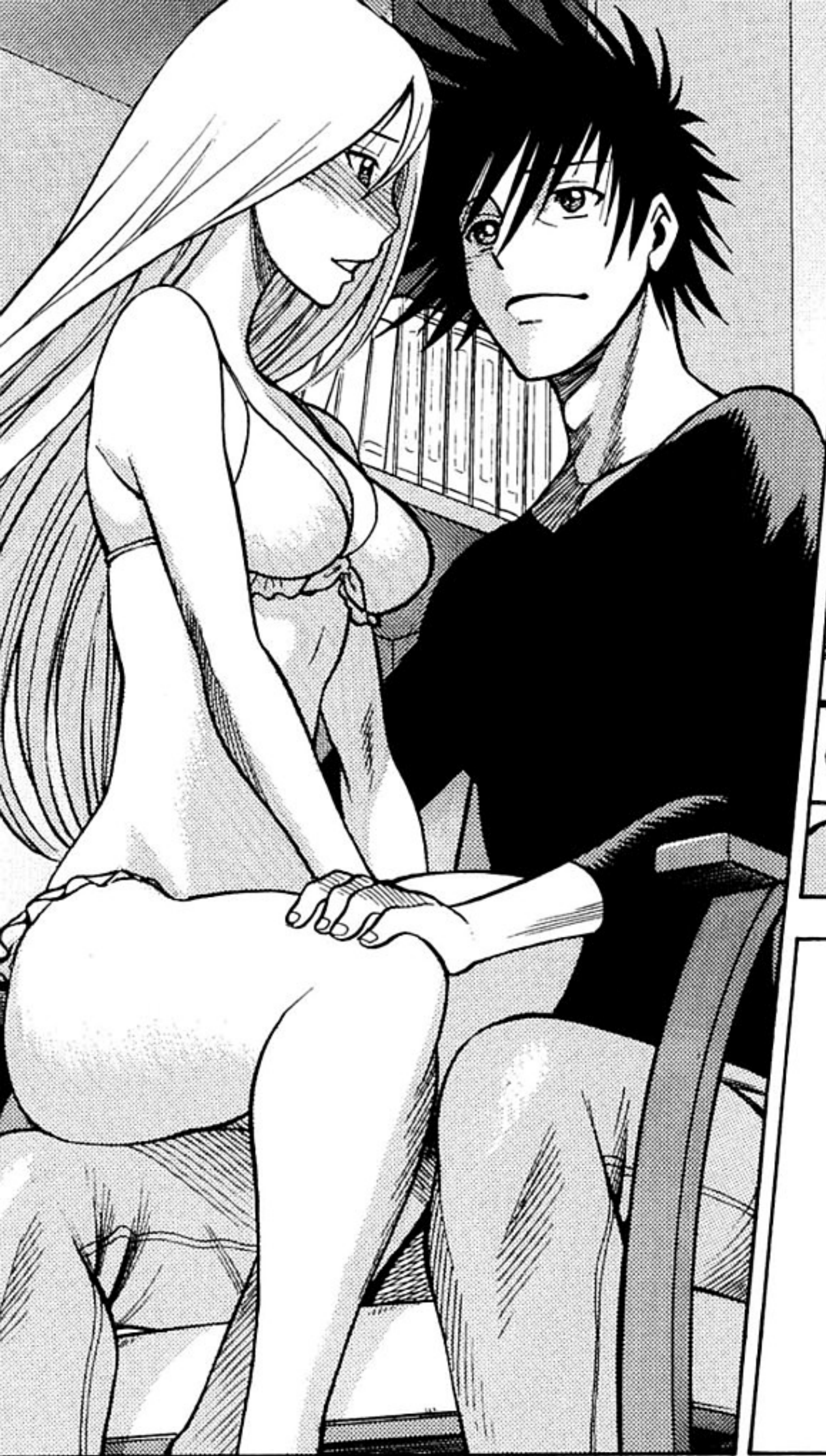
I EVEN
DRESSED
UP LIKE
THIS,
JUST FOR
YOU!



NO.



C'MERE.



I'M
ALWAYS
JUST A
LITTLE KID,
COMPARED
TO YOU.

IT'S
NOT
FAIR.

NO MATTER
HOW HARD
I TRY,
I NEVER
CATCH UP
TO YOU.



THERE'S
NO
HURRY
TO
GROW
UP.

STILL...

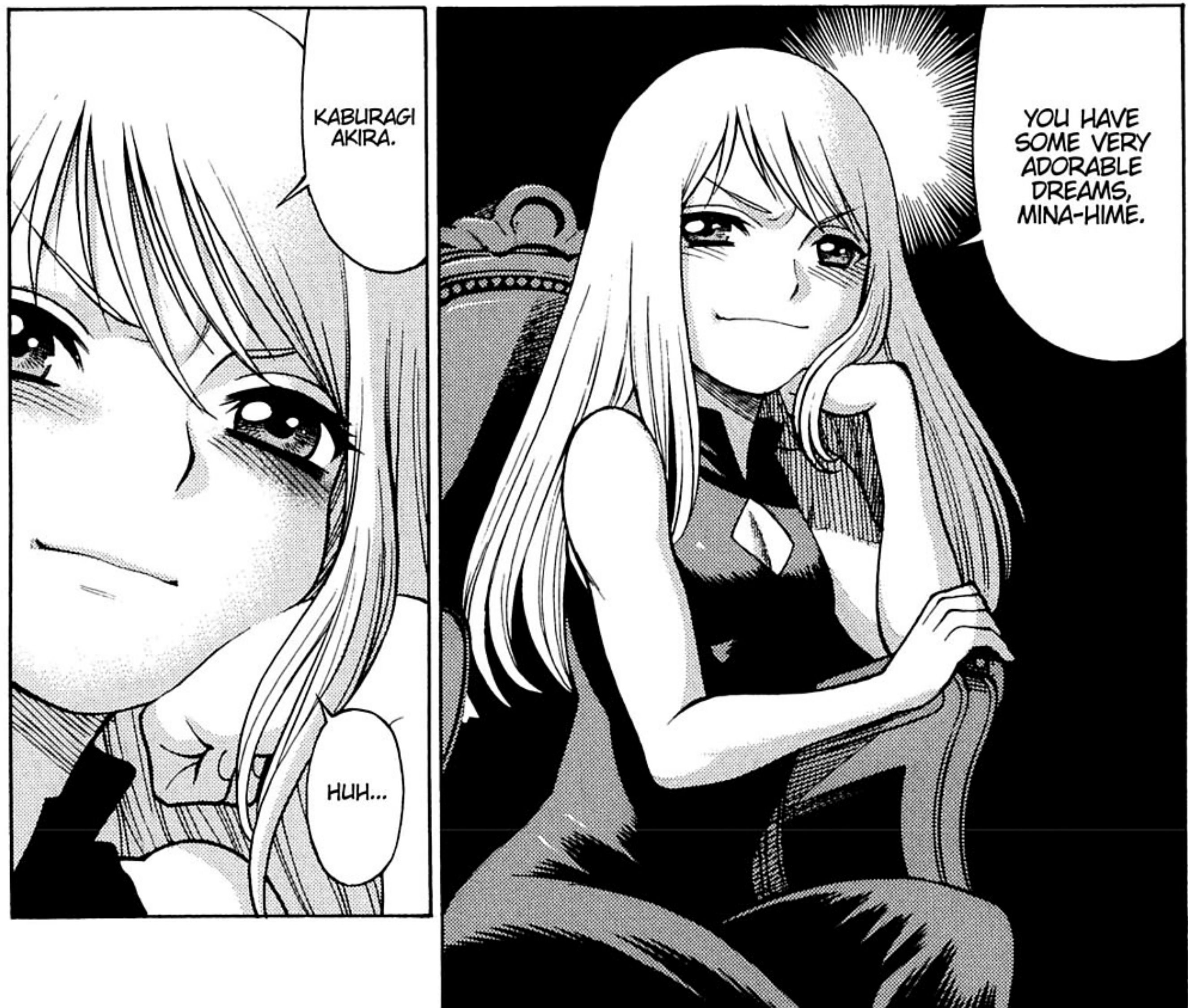
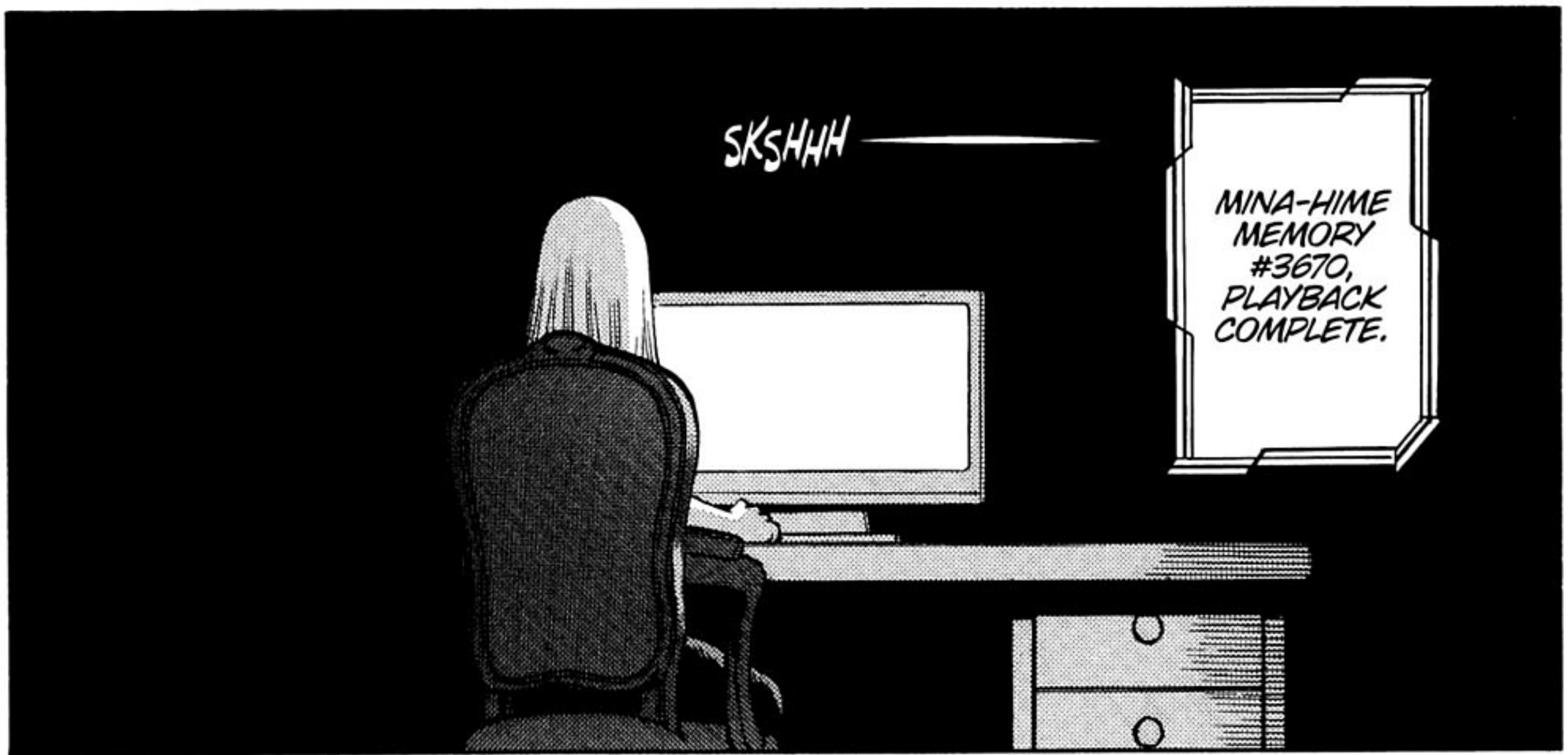
I'D RATHER
YOU STAY
AS MY
LITTLE MINA
FOR JUST
A BIT
LONGER.



I WANT
TO BE A
GROWN-UP
SOMEDAY,
AKIRA.

SKSHHH

I WANT
TO
GROW
UP...





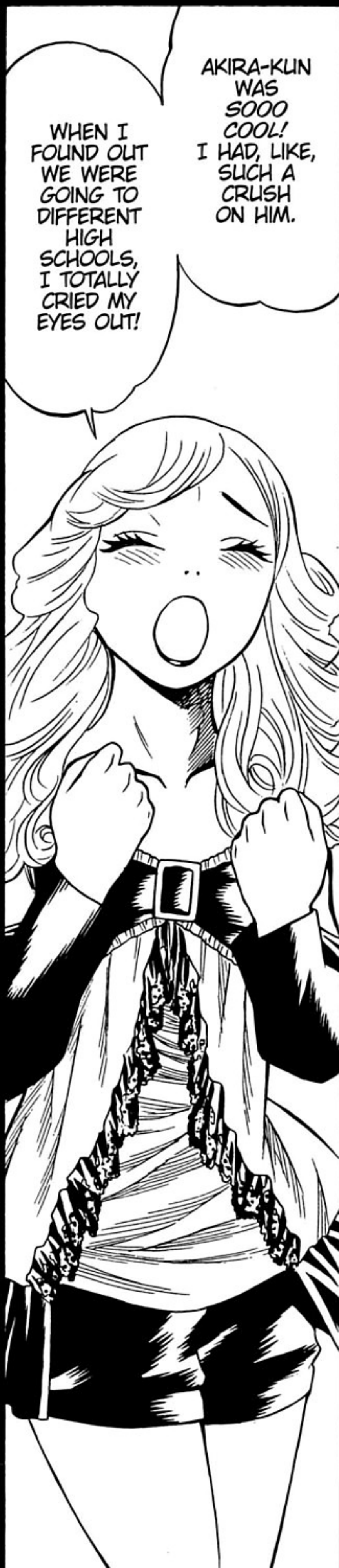
I LOOK
FORWARD
TO THE
DAY WE
MEET.

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

FRIENDS

~A Few Rumors About Him~





HE SUDDENLY
STOPPED
COMING TO
SCHOOL IN
THE MIDDLE
OF THE THIRD
SEMESTER
OF OUR
THIRD YEAR.

I HEARD
HE GOT
HURT
REAL
BAD AND
DIED.

SO HE'S
STILL
ALIVE...?
HUNH.



THERE WERE
SOME,
I DUNNO...
WEIRD
THINGS
ABOUT HIM.

I MEAN,
SOMETIMES
HE'D BE OUT
OF SCHOOL
FOR DAYS
AND DAYS.
FAMILY
STUFF, I
HEARD...



EVERYONE
IN CLASS
LIKED HIM
A LOT,
I GUESS.

IN FACT,
ALL OF US
EVEN MADE A
PROMISE THAT
WE'D NEVER
TRY TO GET
AHEAD OF
EACH OTHER,
HANGING OUT
WITH HIM.



SO SHE'S,
LIKE, A
"PRINCESS,"
AND HE'S
HER
"KNIGHT," OR
WHATEVER?

WE USED
TO BE
GOOD
FRIENDS,
I
THINK...

HE...
CHANGED.

BUT,
WELL...
YOU
KNOW...

IT'S LIKE,
SERIOUSLY?
GET
REAL!

THIS IS
THE 21ST
CENTURY,
Y'KNOW.
BEING
INTO THAT
STUFF IS
TOTALLY
CREEPY.

I MEAN, HE
GOT REALLY
HURT AND
WAS OUT OF
SCHOOL FOR
MONTHS,
RIGHT?
EVER SINCE
THEN, HE,
WELL...



DOESN'T
HE
DISTURB
YOU AT
ALL?

HE'S
SO
LUCKY!
IT'S
NOT
FAIR!

I
THOUGHT
HE WAS
A PRETTY
DECENT
GUY.

I MEAN,
THE
GUY'S
NOT
HUMAN.

I WANT
TO BE
MINA-
CHAN'S
SLAVE,
TOO!

WHEN I
HEARD
ABOUT
WHAT HE
REALLY
WAS, I
WAS LIKE,
"WHAT,
REALLY?"

THEY'RE
A
KILLER'S
EYES.

SOME-
TIMES,
HE GETS
THIS
LOOK.

HE
SCARES
ME...

HIS
EYES...



AL-
WAYS.

I'M
STILL HIS
FRIEND.
ALWAYS
WILL BE.



HE'S
REAL...
REAL FAR
AWAY NOW,
BUT THAT
WON'T
EVER
CHANGE.

He's my friend.
My most
precious friend.



He may be
physically far
away now...

Akira-kun
hasn't
changed.

Not one
bit.

But he is still
right here with
us, too...

Standing by our
sides, smiling.

He is still the
Akira-kun we've
always known.

FRIENDS

~A Few Rumors About Him~



Dance in the
Vampire Bund

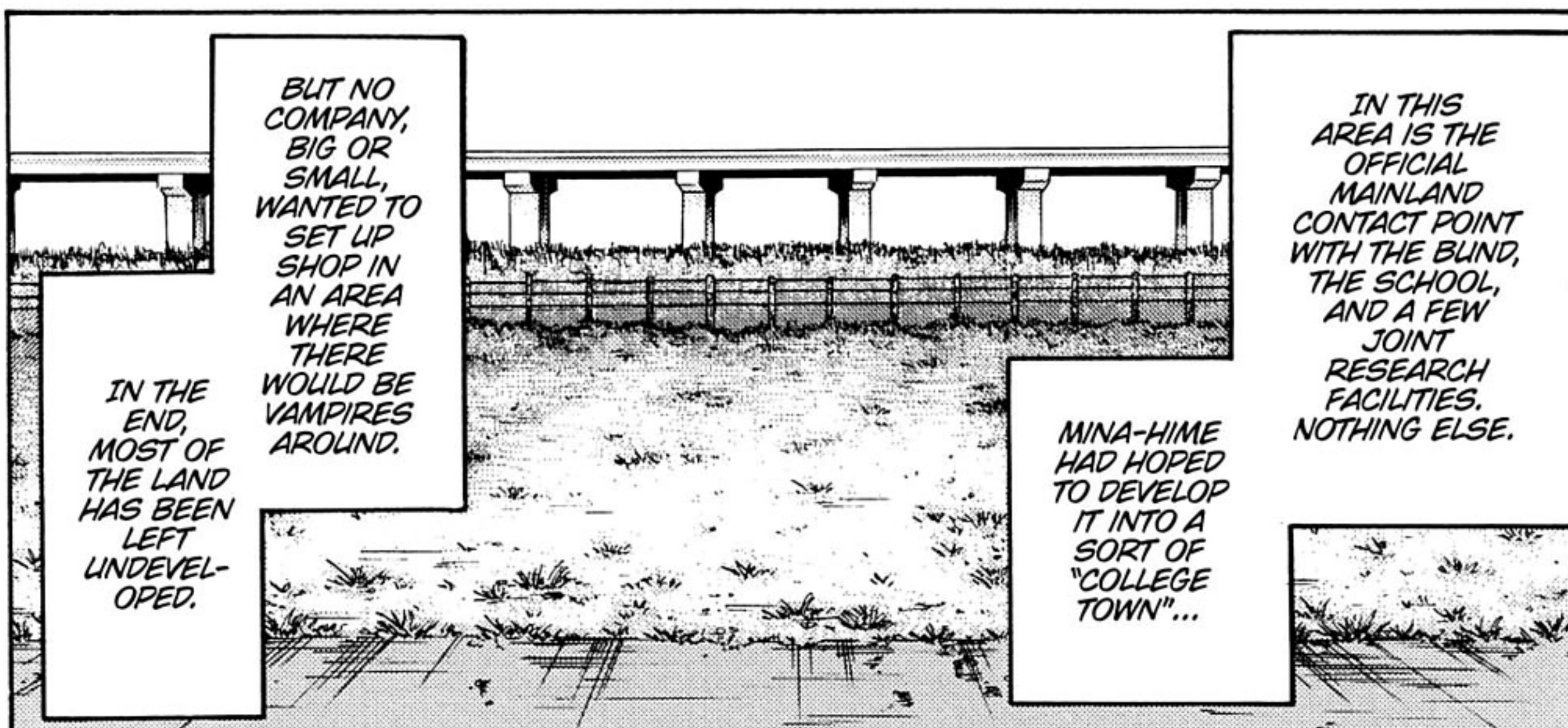
The World of Dance in the Vampire Bund: Building the Bund & School Life

with host Nozomu Tamaki

*THE SCHOOL MINA
AND THE GANG
ATTENDED IS LOCATED
ON THE JAPANESE
MAINLAND, INSIDE THE
JOINT DISTRICT.*



*(TRUTH BE TOLD, THE
SCHOOL DOES NOT HAVE A
NAME. I WAS ASKED TO GIVE
IT ONE WHEN THE ANIME
WAS BEING CREATED,
BUT IT STILL WOUND UP
NAMELESS IN THE END.)*

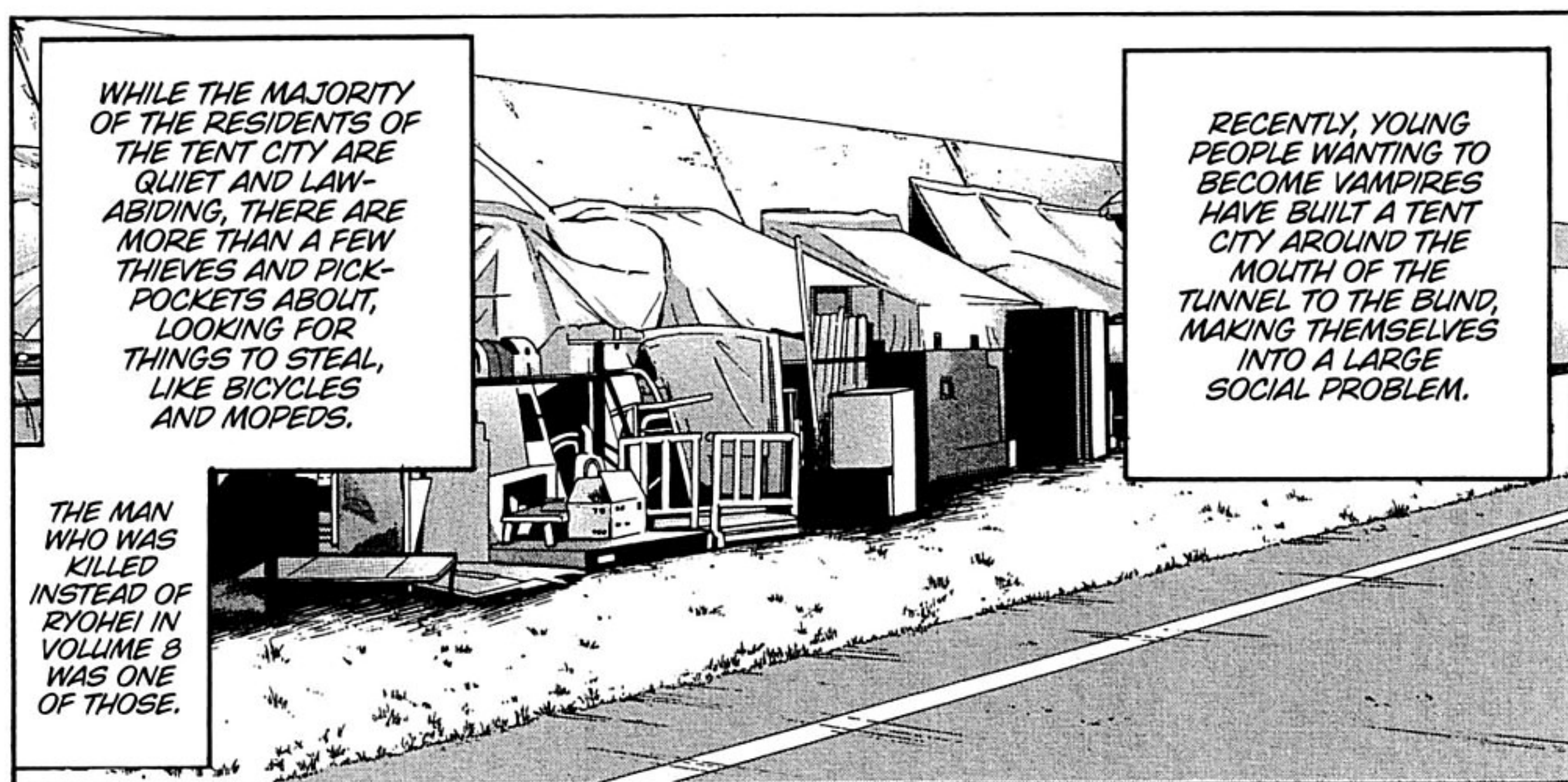


BUT NO COMPANY, BIG OR SMALL, WANTED TO SET UP SHOP IN AN AREA WHERE THERE WOULD BE VAMPIRES AROUND.

IN THE END, MOST OF THE LAND HAS BEEN LEFT UNDEVELOPED.

IN THIS AREA IS THE OFFICIAL MAINLAND CONTACT POINT WITH THE BLIND, THE SCHOOL, AND A FEW JOINT RESEARCH FACILITIES. NOTHING ELSE.

MINA-HIME HAD HOPED TO DEVELOP IT INTO A SORT OF "COLLEGE TOWN"...



WHILE THE MAJORITY OF THE RESIDENTS OF THE TENT CITY ARE QUIET AND LAW-ABIDING, THERE ARE MORE THAN A FEW THIEVES AND PICK-POCKETS ABOUT, LOOKING FOR THINGS TO STEAL, LIKE BICYCLES AND MOPEDS.

THE MAN WHO WAS KILLED INSTEAD OF RYOHEI IN VOLUME 8 WAS ONE OF THOSE.

RECENTLY, YOUNG PEOPLE WANTING TO BECOME VAMPIRES HAVE BUILT A TENT CITY AROUND THE MOUTH OF THE TUNNEL TO THE BLIND, MAKING THEMSELVES INTO A LARGE SOCIAL PROBLEM.



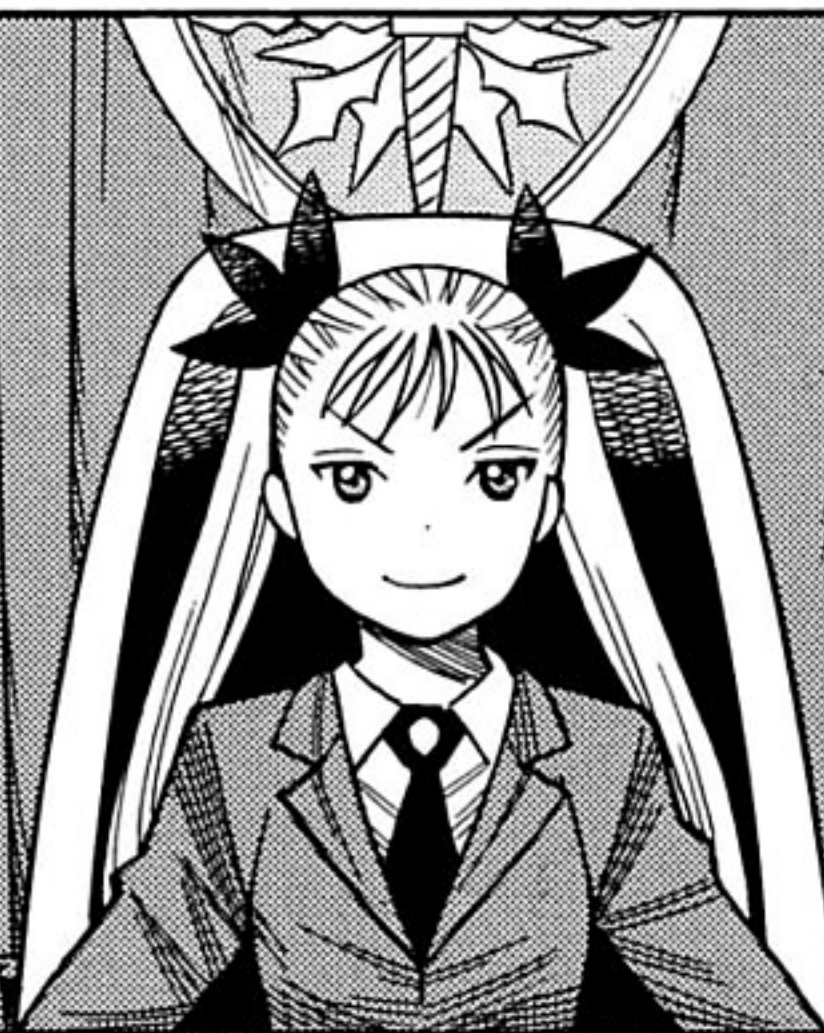
THE SCHOOL INCLUDES ALL GRADES FROM ELEMENTARY UP THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL, AND ABOUT 10% OF THE CURRENT STUDENT POPULATION OF THE SCHOOL ARE VAMPIRES.

MOST OF THOSE VAMPIRES ARE FANGLESS.

A SCHOOL WHERE BOTH HUMANS AND VAMPIRES COULD LEARN, SIDE BY SIDE...

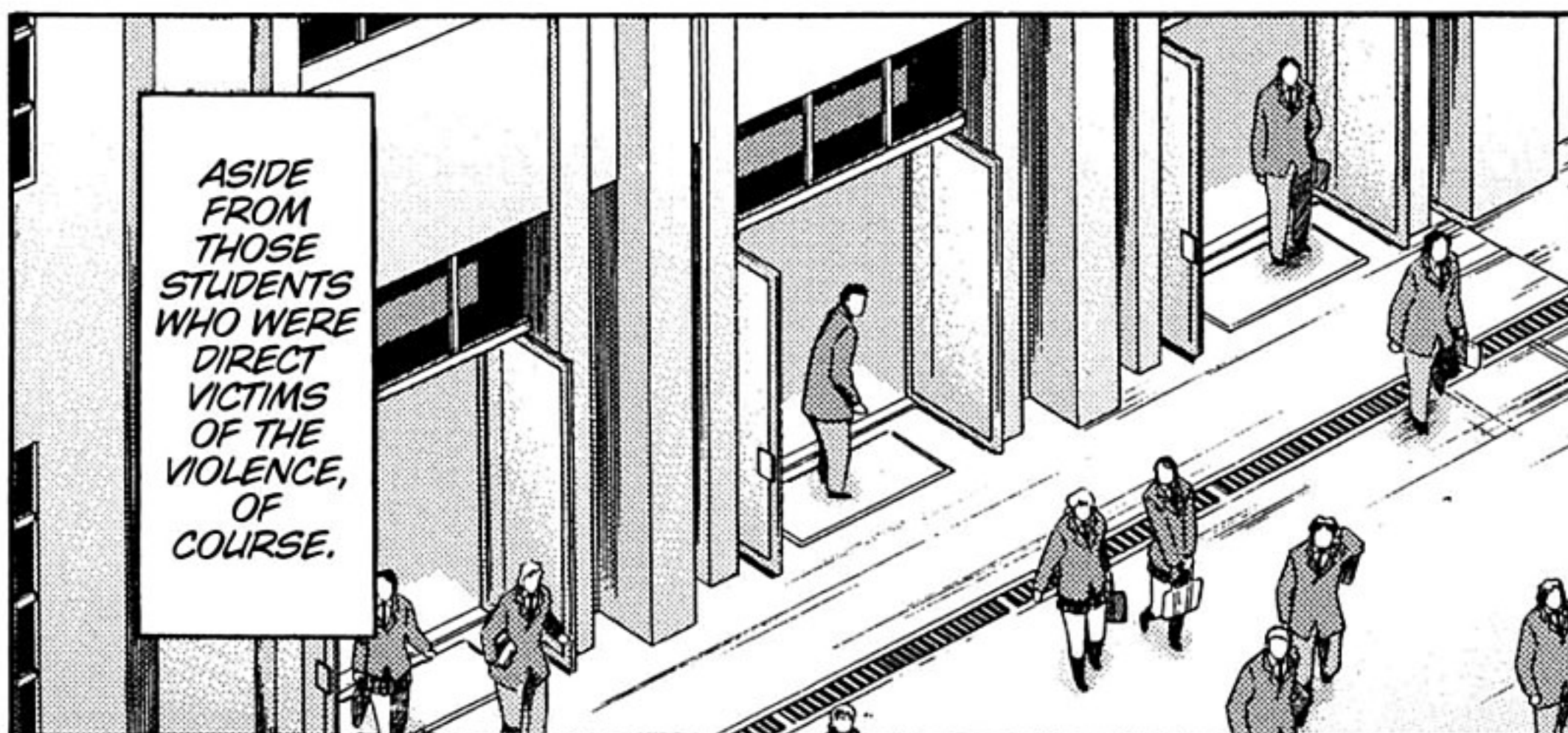
THAT WAS MINA-HIME'S DREAM.

I AM SURE
EVERYONE
REMEMBERS
WELL THE
FUROR THAT
CAUSED.



THE FIRST
STUDENT TO
TRANSFER
INTO THE
SCHOOL WAS
ALSO ITS
FOUNDER AND
ITS FIRST
AND ONLY
DIRECTOR--
MINA-HIME
HERSELF.

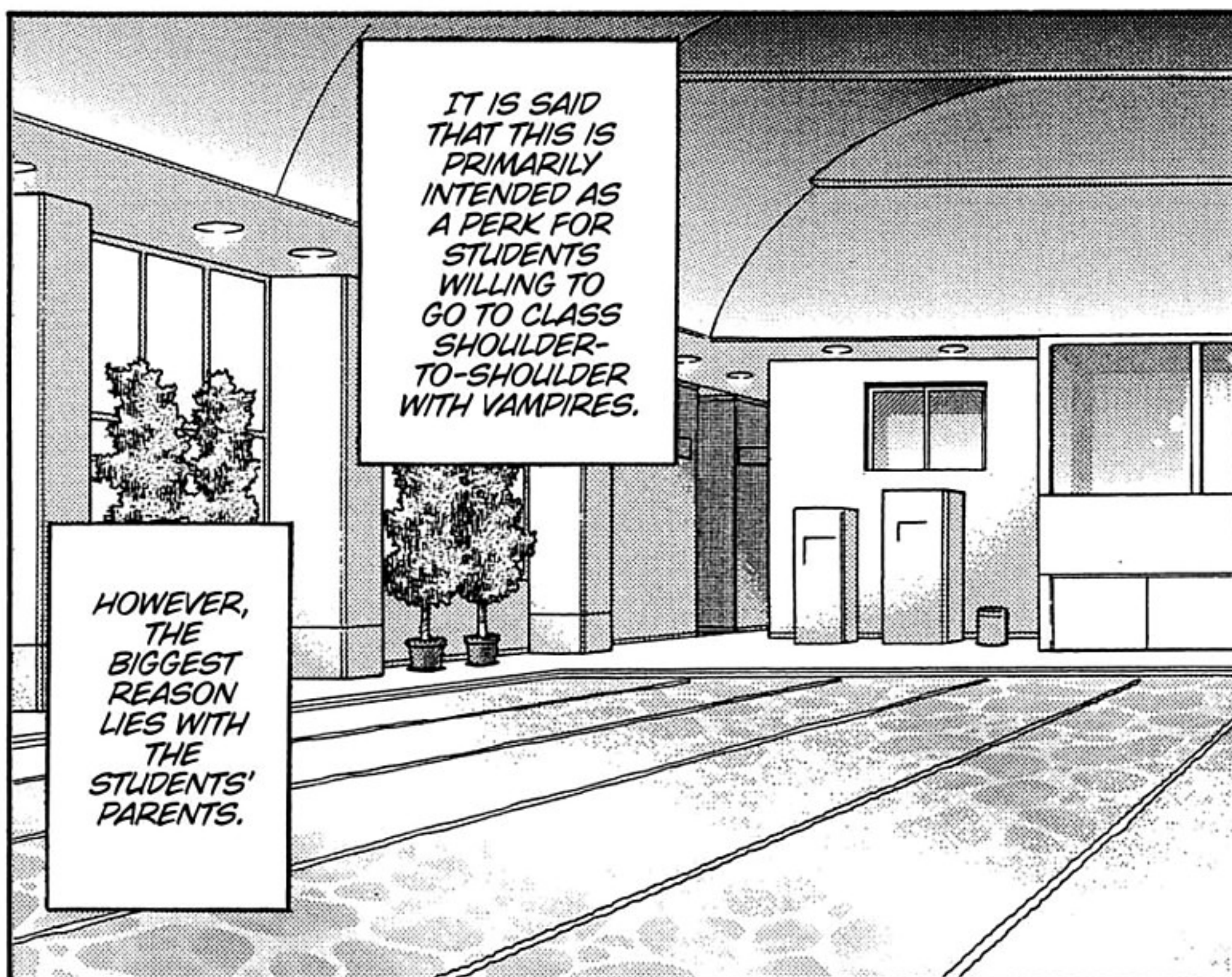
ASIDE
FROM
THOSE
STUDENTS
WHO WERE
DIRECT
VICTIMS
OF THE
VIOLENCE,
OF
COURSE.



SURPRISINGLY,
ONLY A FEW
STUDENTS
TRANSFERRED
OUT OF THE
SCHOOL
BECAUSE
OF THAT
INCIDENT...

IT IS SAID
THAT THIS IS
PRIMARILY
INTENDED AS
A PERK FOR
STUDENTS
WILLING TO
GO TO CLASS
SHOULDER-
TO-SHOULDER
WITH VAMPIRES.

HOWEVER,
THE
BIGGEST
REASON
LIES WITH
THE
STUDENTS'
PARENTS.



MANY STAYED
BECAUSE, FOR
ALL THAT IT IS A
HIGH-LEVEL
SCHOOL WITH
CUTTING-
EDGE MODERN
FACILITIES AND
A TOP-NOTCH
CURRICULUM,
TUITION IS ONLY
A FIFTH OF THAT
OF A STANDARD
PRIVATE SCHOOL.

FROM DESIGN TO COMPLETION, IT TOOK ALMOST TWENTY YEARS TO CONSTRUCT THE BUND. A MASSIVE PROJECT, ITS HUMAN WORKFORCE INVOLVED UPWARDS OF 100,000 PEOPLE.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF THEM ARE LABORERS AND TECHNICIANS, BROUGHT IN FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO BUILD THE BUND.

(FUN FACT: WOLFGANG MADE MANY BUSINESS TRIPS TO JAPAN DURING THIS TIME TO VERIFY PROGRESS. IT WAS DURING ONE OF THESE VISITS THAT HE MET AKIRA'S MOTHER.)



VAMPIRES ARE STRONGER THAN HUMANS, HAVE GREATER ENDURANCE THAN HUMANS, AND WORK WELL DURING THE NIGHT, WHEN HUMANS NEED TO SLEEP.



THE FANGLSS ESPECIALLY, WITH THEIR CALM DEMEANOR AND INDUSTRIOUS NATURE, WERE PERFECT FOR THE JOB.



NOT ONLY THAT ...

NATURALLY, THE HUMAN LABOR FORCE WAS NOT TOLD THAT WHAT THEY WERE BUILDING WOULD SOMEDAY BE A VAMPIRE KINGDOM.

THEY HAD NO IDEA THAT MANY OF THEIR CO-WORKERS WERE VAMPIRES THEMSELVES.



MUCH OF THE VAMPIRE LABOR FORCE WORKING ON THE BUND WERE FOREIGNERS. BEING AN INTERPRETER, YUKI'S MOTHER WAS BROUGHT IN TO ENSURE A SMOOTH FLOW OF INFORMATION BETWEEN THE VAMPIRE TECHNICIANS AND THE JAPANESE STAFF.



IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT YUKI-CHAN'S YET-UNSEEN MOTHER WAS ALSO INVOLVED IN THE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT. IN FACT, SHE SPECIFICALLY MOVED TO TOKYO FOR IT.

BUT SHE NEVER THOUGHT MUCH MORE THAN THAT ABOUT HER SOMETIMES ODD CO-WORKERS.

LATER, WHEN SHE DISCOVERED THEY WERE ACTUALLY VAMPIRES, SHE NEARLY FAINTED.

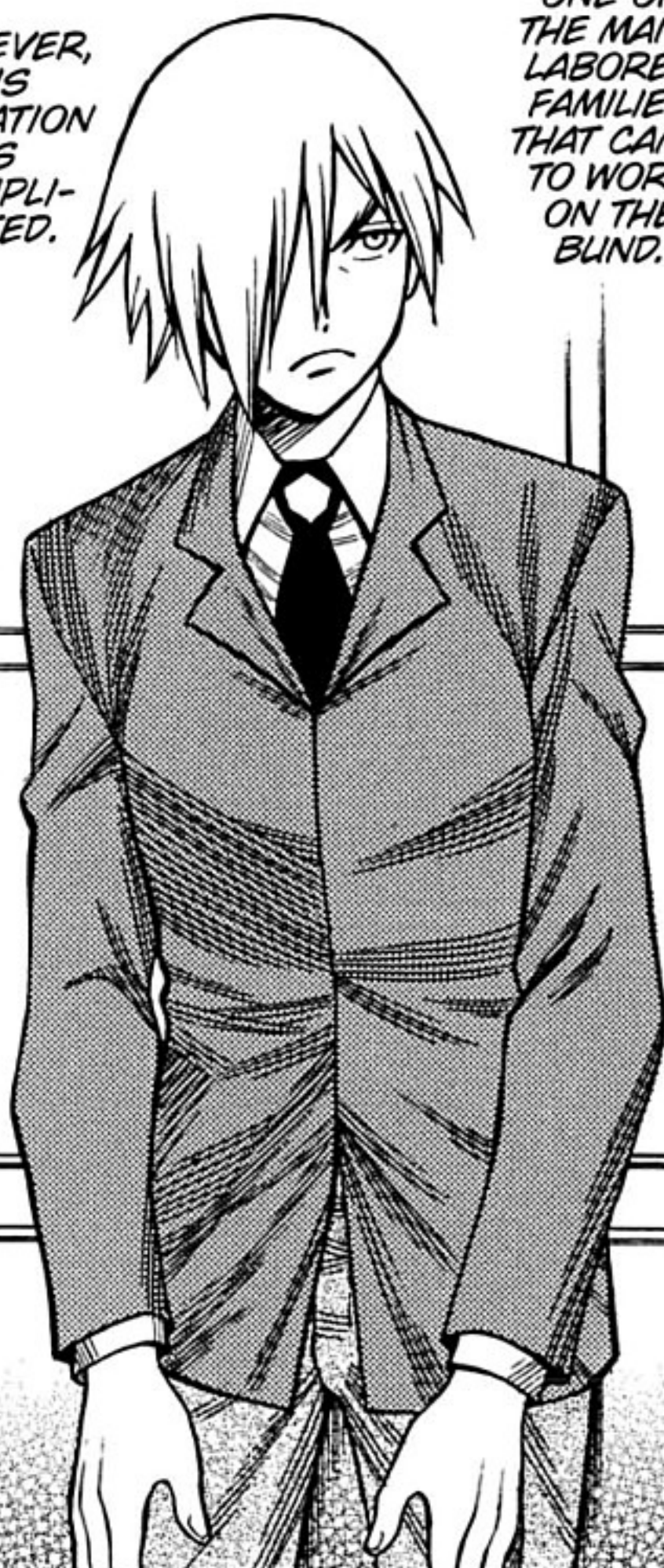
SHE NEVER SEEMS TO GET ANY OLDER.

I WONDER WHAT SHE IS USING FOR MAKE-UP?



SHE WORKED WITH THE SAME PEOPLE FOR MANY, MANY YEARS ON THE PROJECT...

HOWEVER, HIS SITUATION IS COMPLICATED.



RYOHEI'S FAMILY WAS ONE OF THE MANY LABORER FAMILIES THAT CAME TO WORK ON THE BUND.

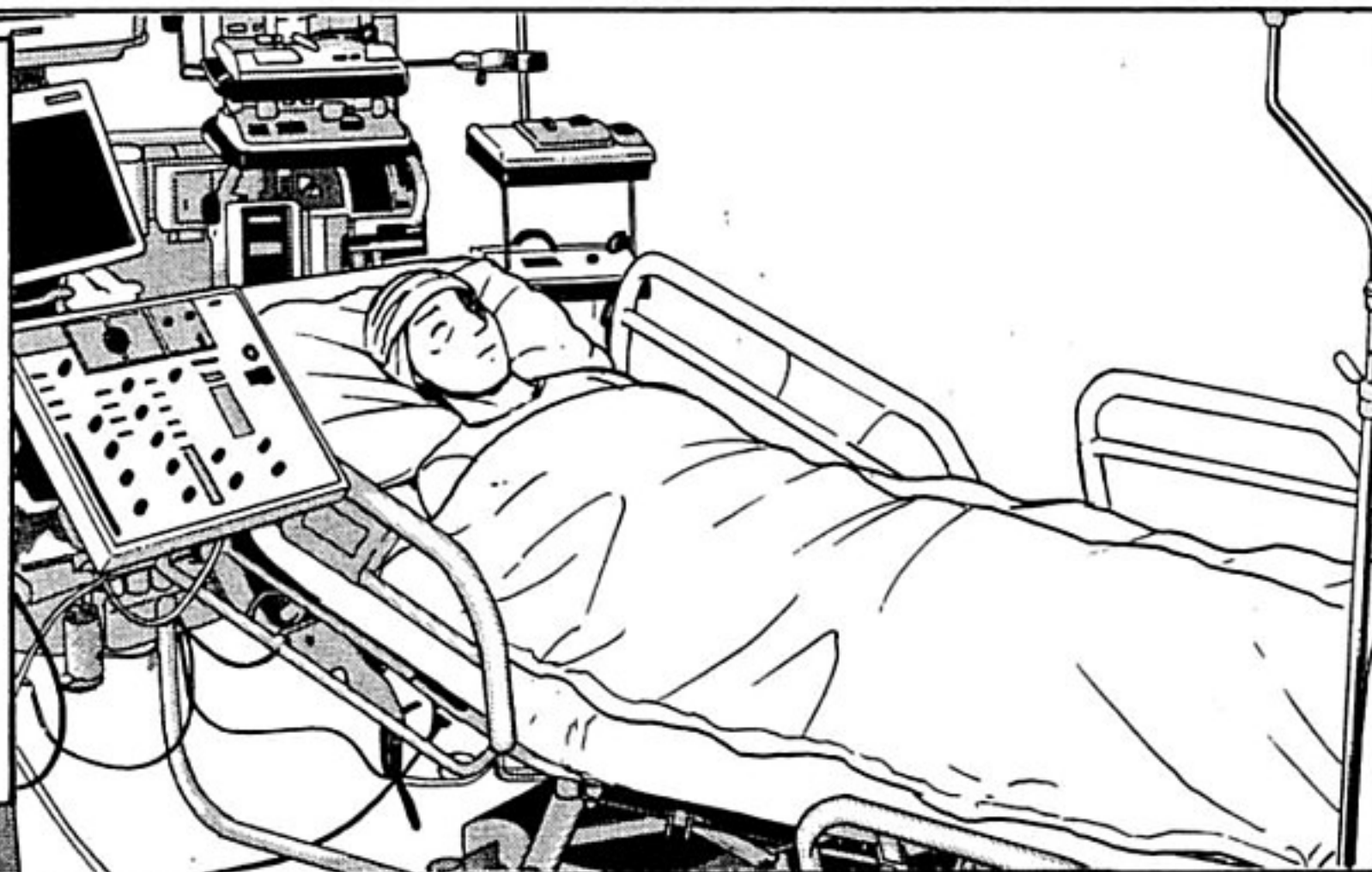


THEY WERE THE PEOPLE THEY HAD BEEN WORKING SIDE BY SIDE WITH FOR YEARS, TRUSTED CO-WORKERS AND EVEN FRIENDS...

IT TAUGHT THEM THAT NOT ALL VAMPIRES WERE DANGEROUS MONSTERS.

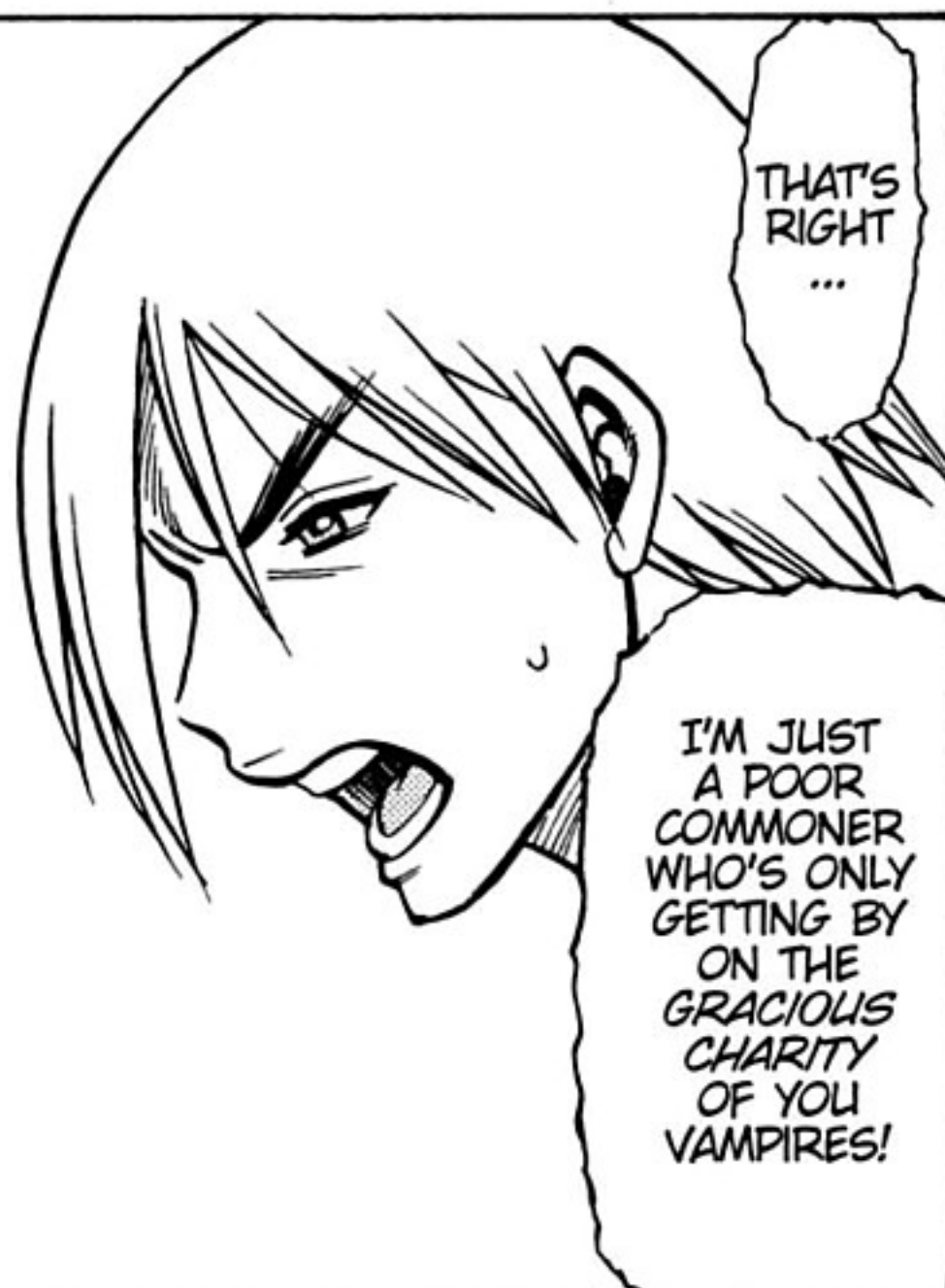
AND THEY WERE VAMPIRES. THEIR EXPERIENCES TOGETHER HAD A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE STUDENTS' PARENTS.

THE FAMILY'S
ONE SOURCE OF
INCOME LOST,
THE ONLY THING
THAT SAVED THEM
FROM FINANCIAL
RUIN WAS AID
FROM THE BUND.
MONETARY
REPARATION.
COMPENSATORY
WAGES. EVEN
RYOHEI'S TUITION
FEES WERE
COMPLETELY
WAIVED.



HIS FATHER
WAS
SEVERELY
INJURED
IN A CON-
STRUCTION
ACCIDENT.
HE IS STILL
HOSPITAL-
IZED TO
THIS DAY.

BUT I
STILL
WANTED
YOU
MONSTERS
OUT!



THAT'S
RIGHT
...

I'M JUST
A POOR
COMMONER
WHO'S ONLY
GETTING BY
ON THE
GRACIOUS
CHARITY
OF YOU
VAMPIRES!

THAT TRUTH
STUNG
RYOHEI'S
YOUNG
PRIDE
GREATLY.

HIS FAMILY
ONLY
MANAGED
TO SURVIVE
BECAUSE
THEY WERE
UNDER THE
"CARE" OF
INHUMAN
CREATURES.

DON'T
TALK
TO
ME!



TRAITOR!

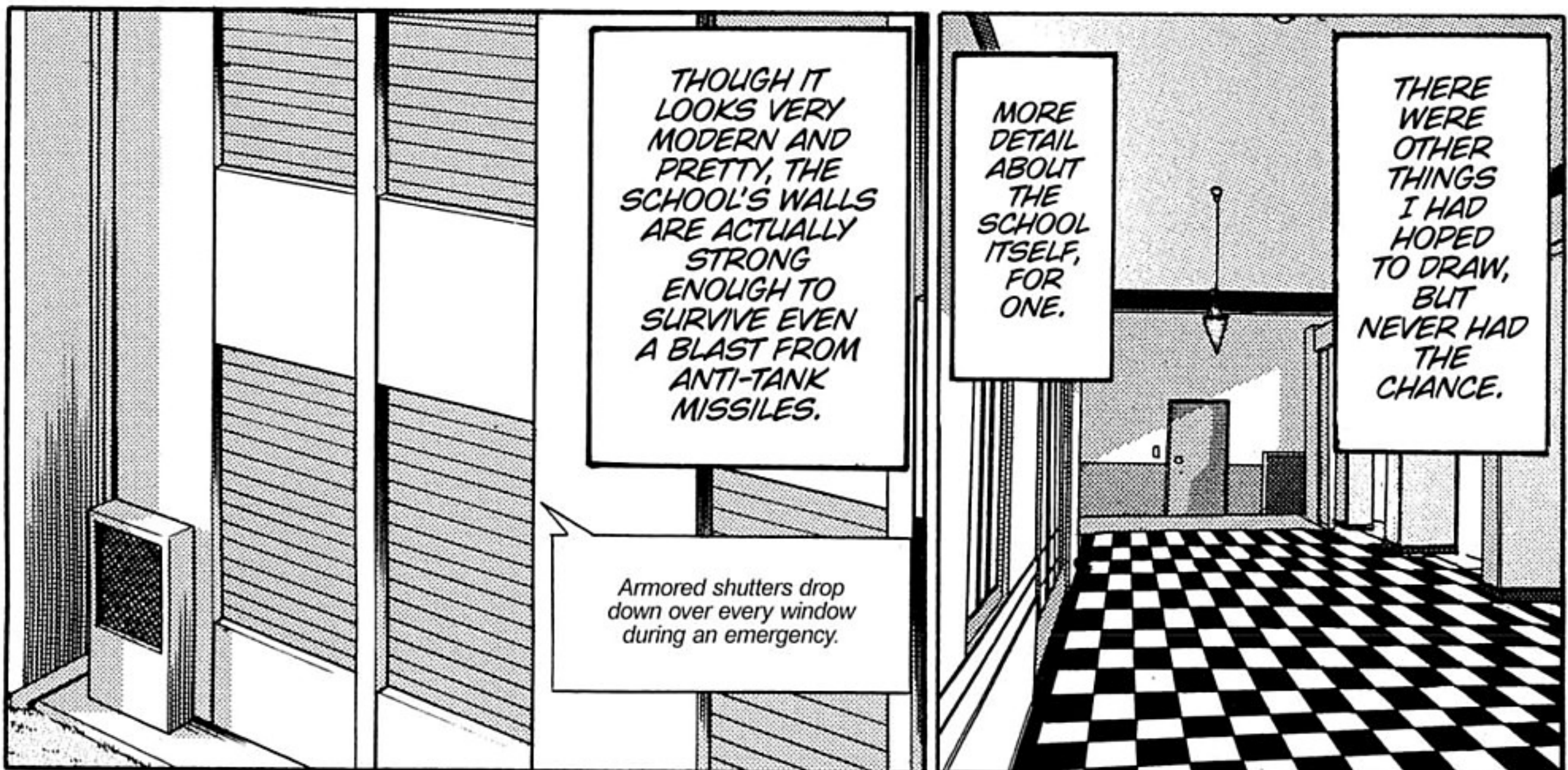
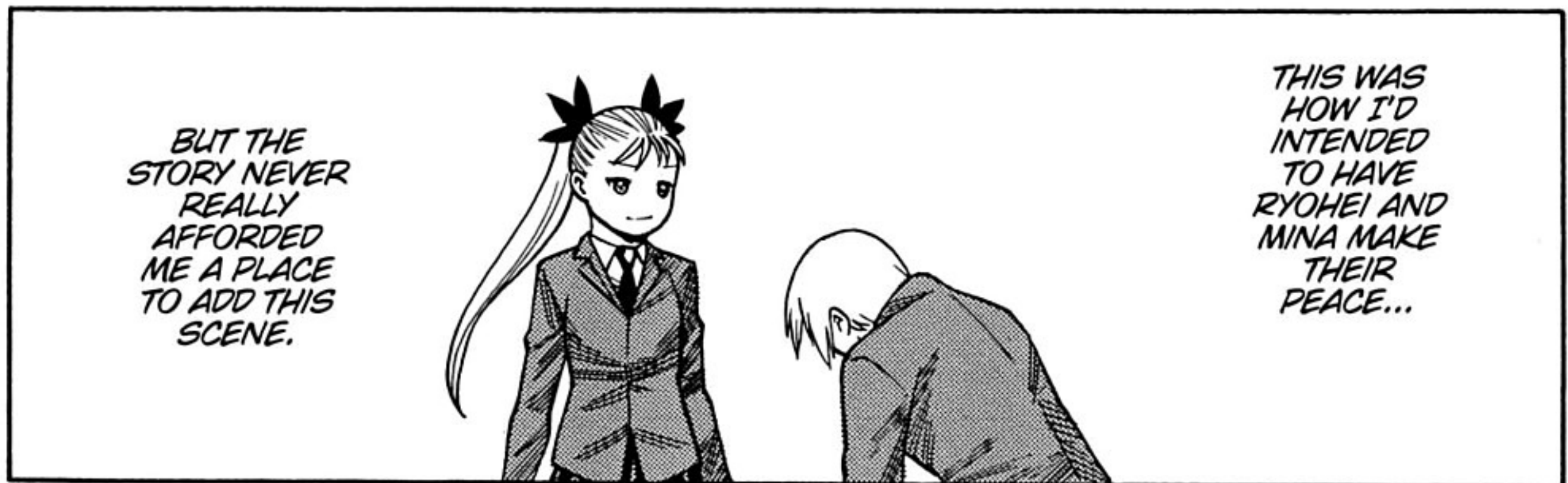
AND
YOU
KNEW
THAT,
RIGHT?

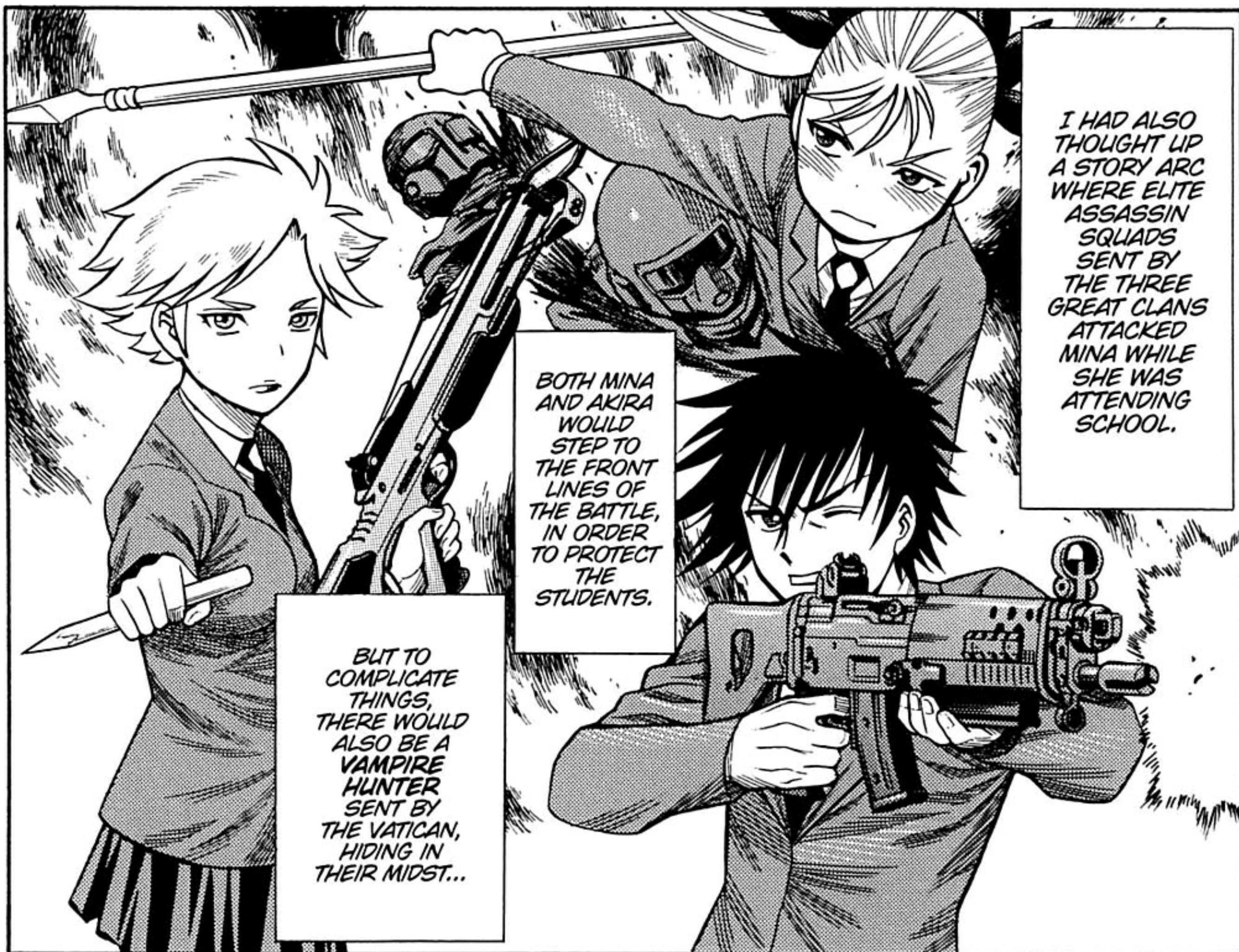
YOU KNEW I
WAS BEING A
HYPOCRITICAL
BASTARD.
AND YOU
LAUGHED AT
ME BEHIND
MY BACK
ABOUT IT,
TOO, I BET!

HELL,
I
KNOW
YOU
DID!



RYOHEI'S
STUBBORN
ANTAGONISM
TOWARDS
ANYTHING
VAMPIRE-
RELATED
STEMS
FROM THIS.





I HAD ALSO
THOUGHT UP
A STORY ARC
WHERE ELITE
ASSASSIN
SQUADS
SENT BY
THE THREE
GREAT CLANS
ATTACKED
MINA WHILE
SHE WAS
ATTENDING
SCHOOL.

BOTH MINA
AND AKIRA
WOULD
STEP TO
THE FRONT
LINES OF
THE BATTLE,
IN ORDER
TO PROTECT
THE
STUDENTS.

BUT TO
COMPLICATE
THINGS,
THERE WOULD
ALSO BE A
VAMPIRE
HUNTER
SENT BY
THE VATICAN,
HIDING IN
THEIR MIDST...

AND, MORE
IMPORTANTLY, AS THE
STORY PROGRESSED,
THE IDEA OF "VAMPIRE
HUNTERS" LURKING IN
THE SHADOWS DIDN'T
FIT WITH THE MORE
REALISTIC NATURE OF
THE BLIND'S WORLD.

THE IDEA WAS
DROPPED BECAUSE
I HAD ALREADY
LAID OUT VOLUME 9'S
ATTACK ON THE BLIND
FAIRLY EARLY ON,
AND THE TWO ARCS
WOULD HAVE ENDED
UP BEING SIMILAR.

IN
EXCHANGE,
THE VATICAN
QUIETLY
TOLERATES
THE
EXISTENCE
OF THE
BLIND.



AS IT STANDS,
FOR THE SAFETY
OF VAMPIRE
SOCIETY AS A
WHOLE, HOUSE
TEPES HAS
FORGED AN
UNWRITTEN
PACT OF NON-
AGGRESSION
WITH THE
VATICAN.



NOW, ON A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT SUBJECT... THE SCHOOL HAS A HUGE STUDENT POPULATION, GIVEN HOW MANY GRADES IT COVERS. THAT MEANS LOTS OF CLUB SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES--UPWARDS OF 300 DIFFERENT ONES, IN FACT.



HUH? WEIRD! I FEEL EYES ON ME!

EVEN THOUGH HE HIMSELF IS UNAWARE OF THE CLUB.

BLUNT, BUT KIND. CHIVALROUS, LIKE A CHARACTER FROM AN OLD SHOUJO MANGA...

AKIRA IS, IN FACT, QUITE POPULAR WITH BOTH MAIDENS AND FUJOSHI* IN THE SCHOOL.

WE'RE MEMBERS, TOO!

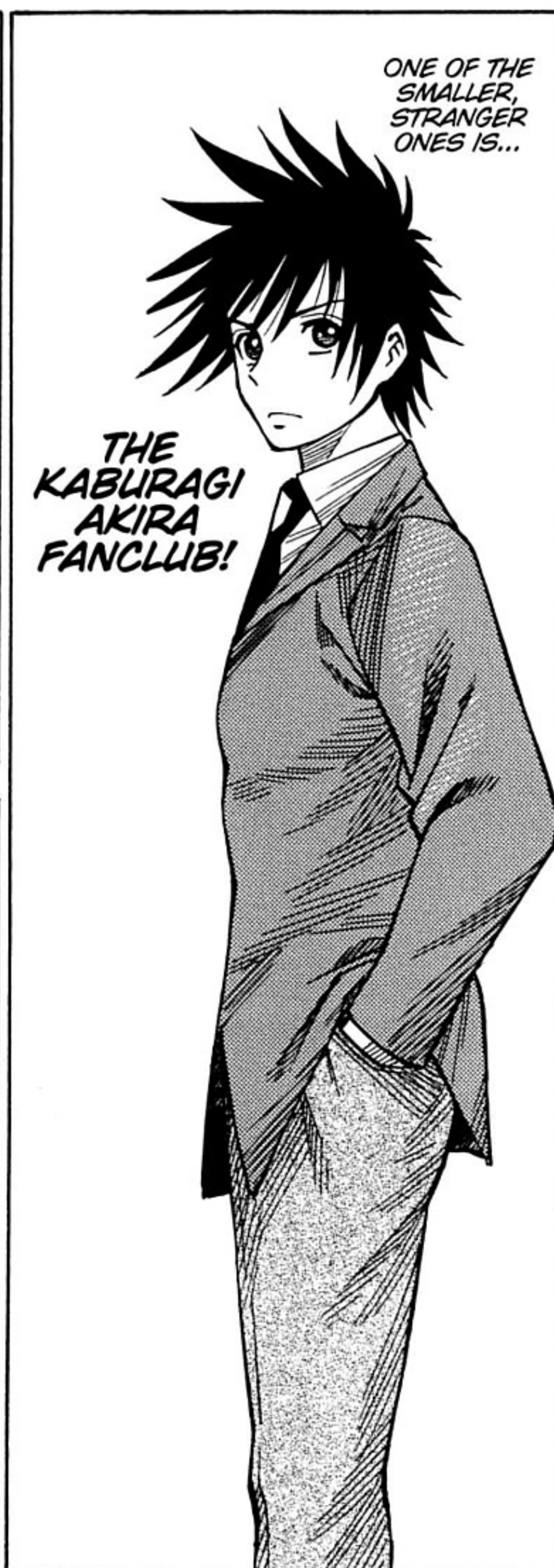
*Fujoshi: literally "rotten girl," a self-mocking term for female fans of yaoi.



THE SPECIAL ADVISOR'S SPECIAL ADJUNCT.

TO COMPLICATE MATTERS, WHEN MINA CAUGHT WIND OF THE CLUB, SHE IMMEDIATELY MADE HEAVY-HANDED USE OF HER DIRECTOR'S POWERS TO INSTALL HERSELF AS SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE CLUB.

WHEN IT COMES TO WATCHING AKIRA, NONE CAN OUTDO ME!



ONE OF THE SMALLER, STRANGER ONES IS...

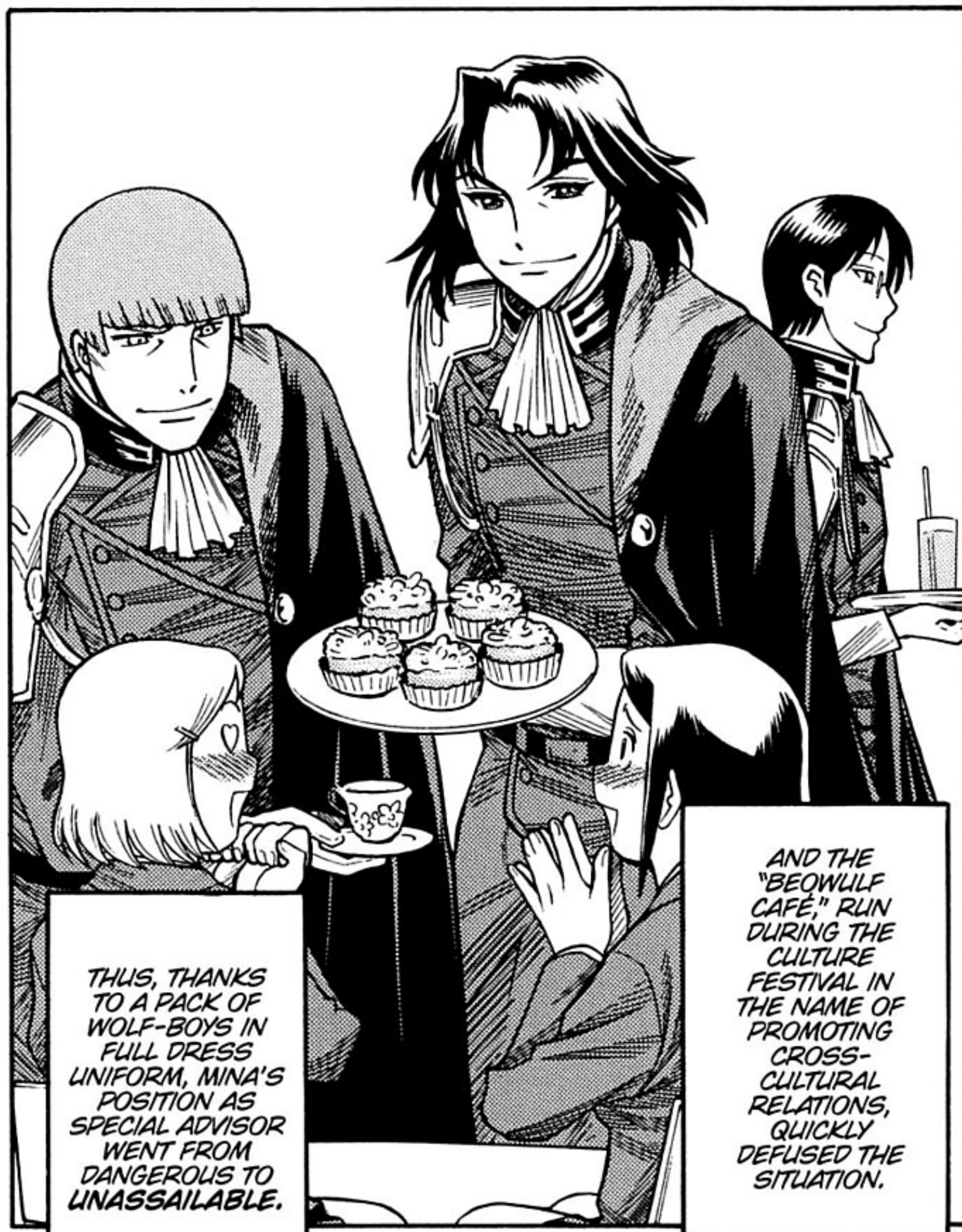
THE KABURAGI AKIRA FANCLUB!



AT FIRST,
IT WAS
FEARED THIS
WOULD
DEVOLVE INTO
A DIRTY,
NASTY,
KNOCK-DOWN,
DRAG-OUT
FIGHT.

BUT
AFTER
MINA'S
BOLD
MOVE,
THEY
DECIDED
ON SWIFT,
THOROUGH
ACTION!

EVEN
DURING THE
STUDENT
COUNCIL'S
INSURRECTION
MOVEMENT,
THE SCHOOL'S
FUJOSHI
TOOK A
NEUTRAL
POSITION.



THIS, THANKS
TO A PACK OF
WOLF-BOYS IN
FULL DRESS
UNIFORM, MINA'S
POSITION AS
SPECIAL ADVISOR
WENT FROM
DANGEROUS TO
UNASSAILABLE.

AND THE
"BEOWULF
CAFÉ," RUN
DURING THE
CULTURE
FESTIVAL IN
THE NAME OF
PROMOTING
CROSS-
CULTURAL
RELATIONS,
QUICKLY
DEFUSED THE
SITUATION.



BUT A FEW
STRATEGI-
CALLY
DISTRIBUTED
PICTURES OF
AKIRA FROM
MINA'S
PERSONAL
PHOTO
ALBUM...



YES~!!

YOU
REALLY
THINK
THIS IS
FUN?



ALREADY A SCHOOL KNOWN FOR ITS RELAXED AND OPEN ATMOSPHERE, MINA'S ARRIVAL MADE A BIG IMPACT.

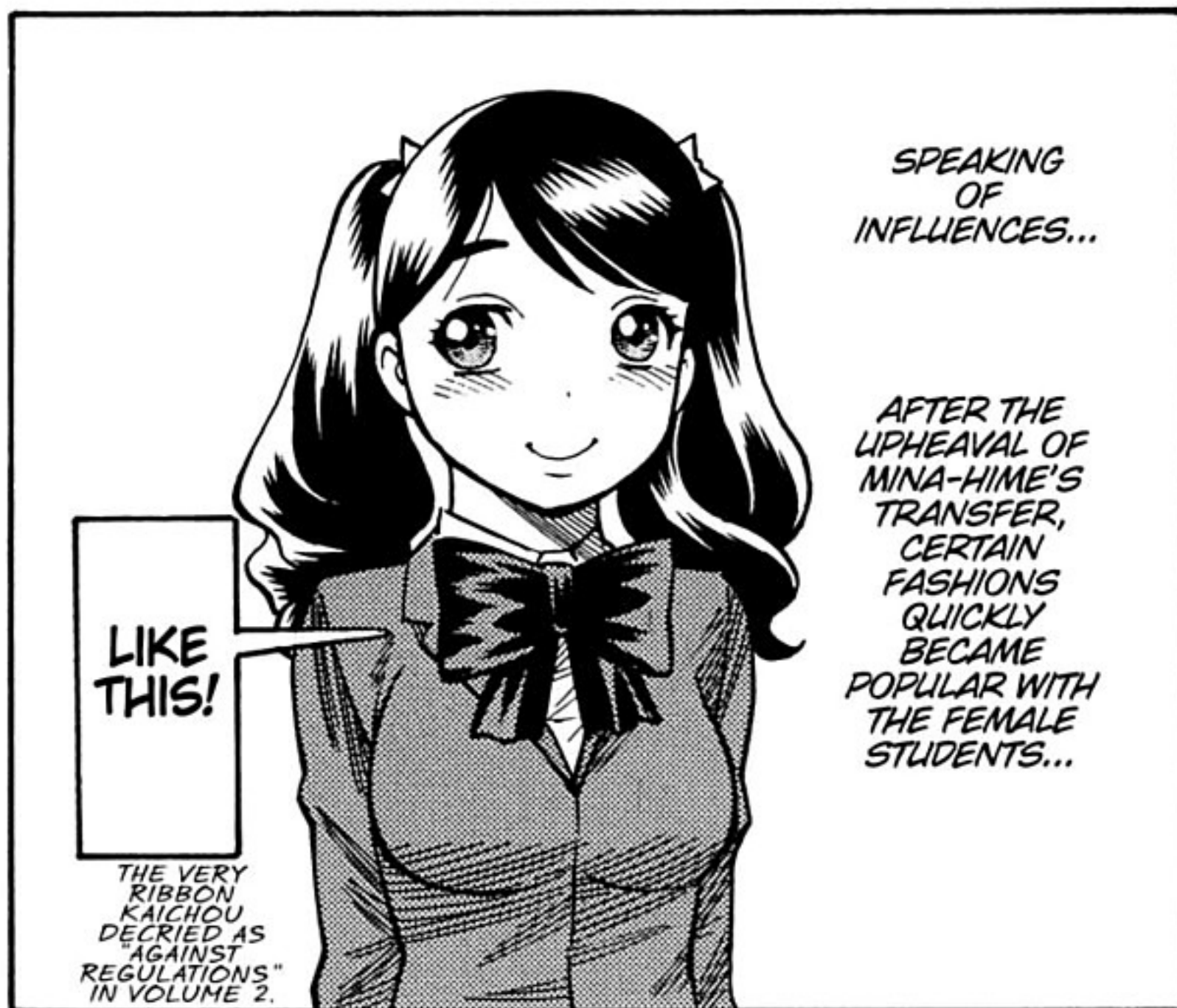
HER INFLUENCE WAS FELT ACROSS THE SCHOOL, MAKING IT AN EVEN MORE LIVELY AND ACTIVE PLACE.



BEING AROUND IN THE DAYS OF URUSEI YATSURA'S "BEAUTIFUL DREAMER" MOVIE...

HIME-SAMA WOULD TOTALLY GET INTO THE CHEERING COMPETITION.

I REALLY WANTED TO DRAW THINGS LIKE THE CULTURE FESTIVAL AND THE SPORTS FESTIVAL.

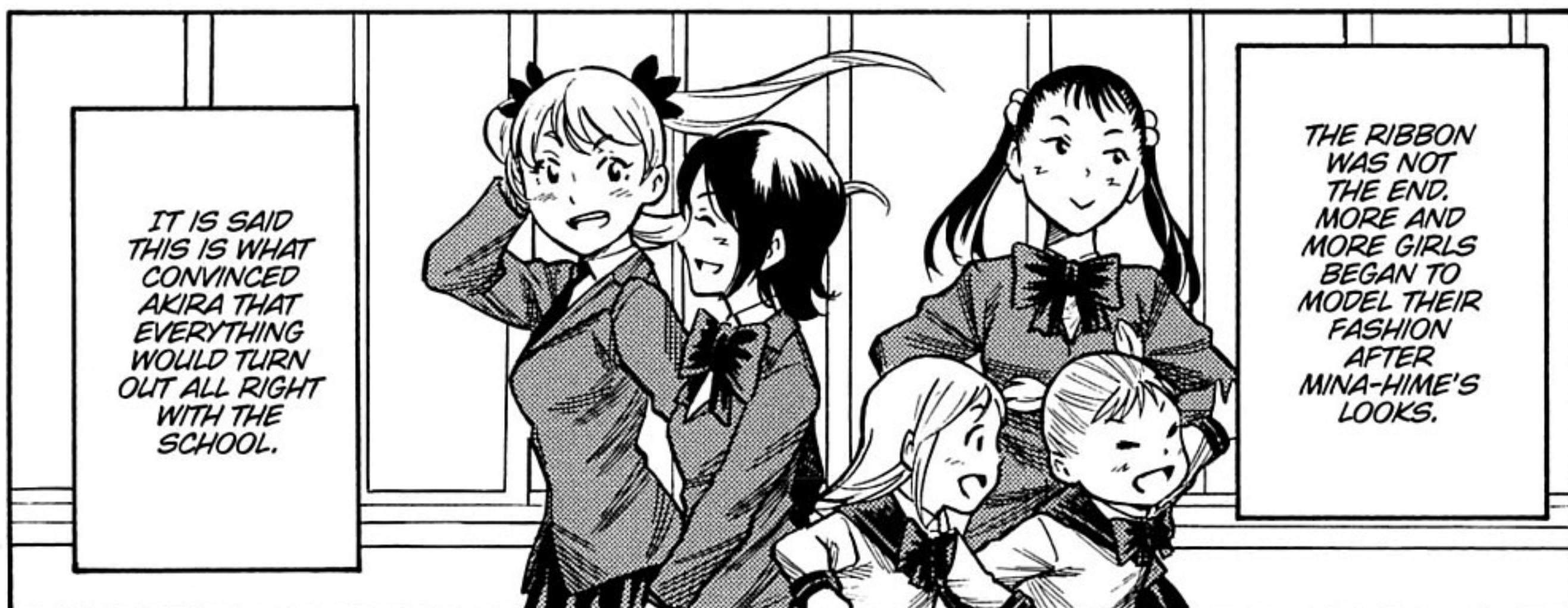


SPEAKING OF INFLUENCES...

AFTER THE UPHEAVAL OF MINA-HIME'S TRANSFER, CERTAIN FASHIONS QUICKLY BECAME POPULAR WITH THE FEMALE STUDENTS...

LIKE THIS!

THE VERY RIBBON KAICHOU DECRIED AS "AGAINST REGULATIONS" IN VOLUME 2.

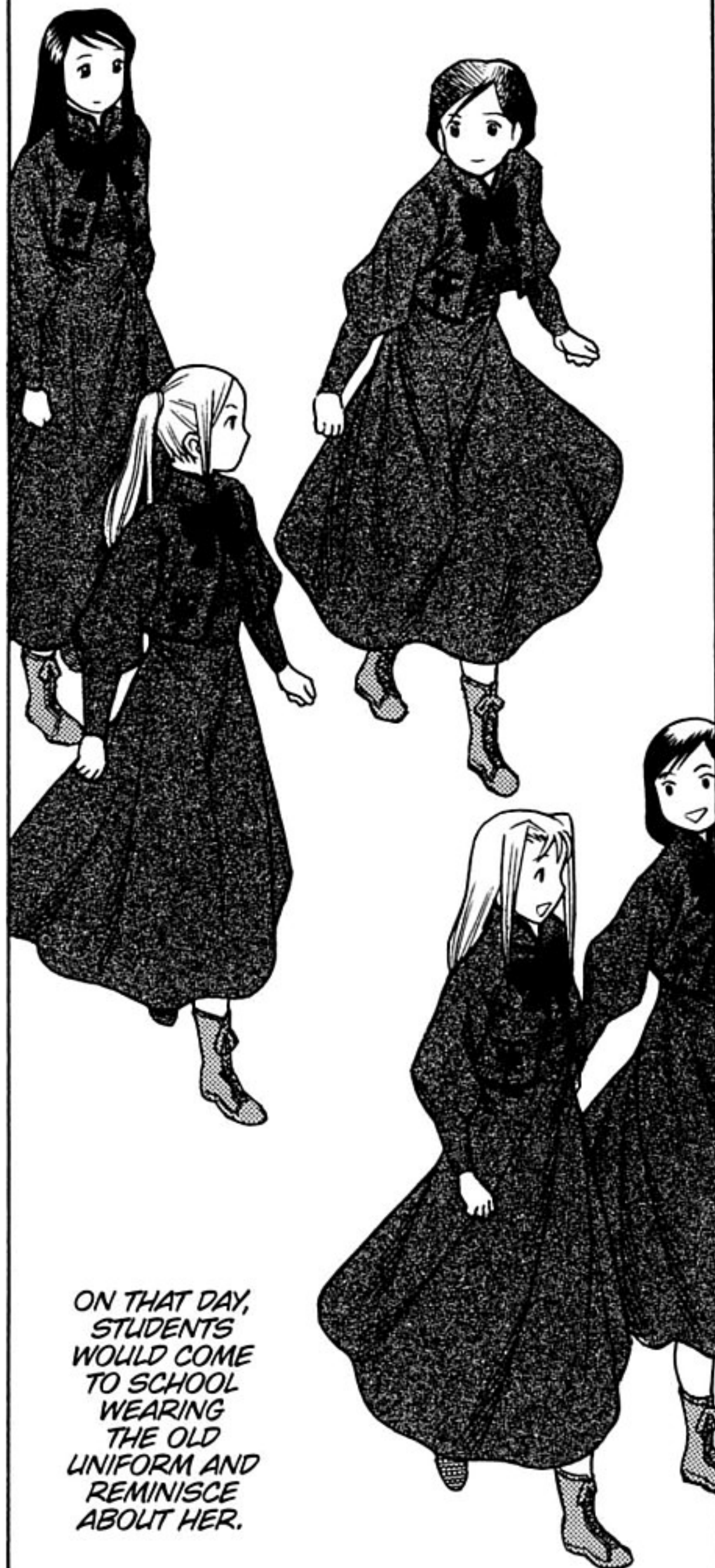


IT IS SAID THIS IS WHAT CONVINCED AKIRA THAT EVERYTHING WOULD TURN OUT ALL RIGHT WITH THE SCHOOL.

THE RIBBON WAS NOT THE END. MORE AND MORE GIRLS BEGAN TO MODEL THEIR FASHION AFTER MINA-HIME'S LOOKS.

FOR SEVERAL YEARS AFTER SHE LEFT, THEY DECLARED THE DAY SHE TRANSFERRED AS A SCHOOL HOLIDAY-- "HIME-SAMA'S DAY."

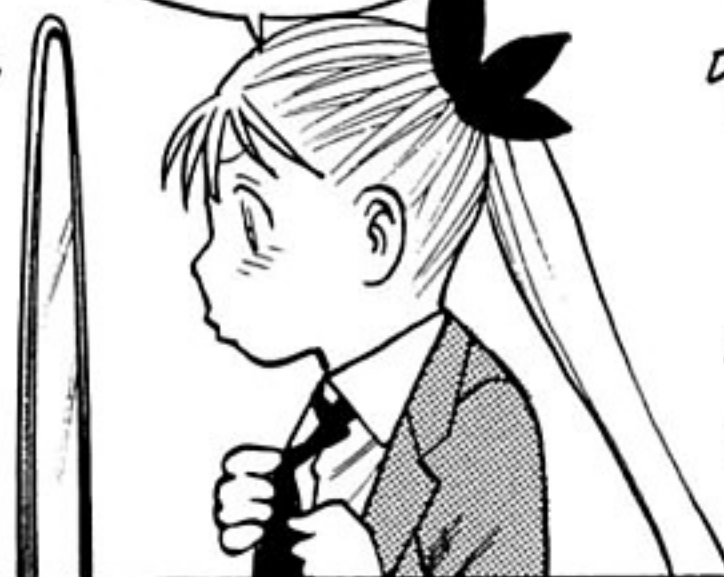
DESPITE HER TURBULENT ARRIVAL, MANY STUDENTS MISSED HER AFTER HER DEPARTURE.



ON THAT DAY, STUDENTS WOULD COME TO SCHOOL WEARING THE OLD UNIFORM AND REMINISCE ABOUT HER.

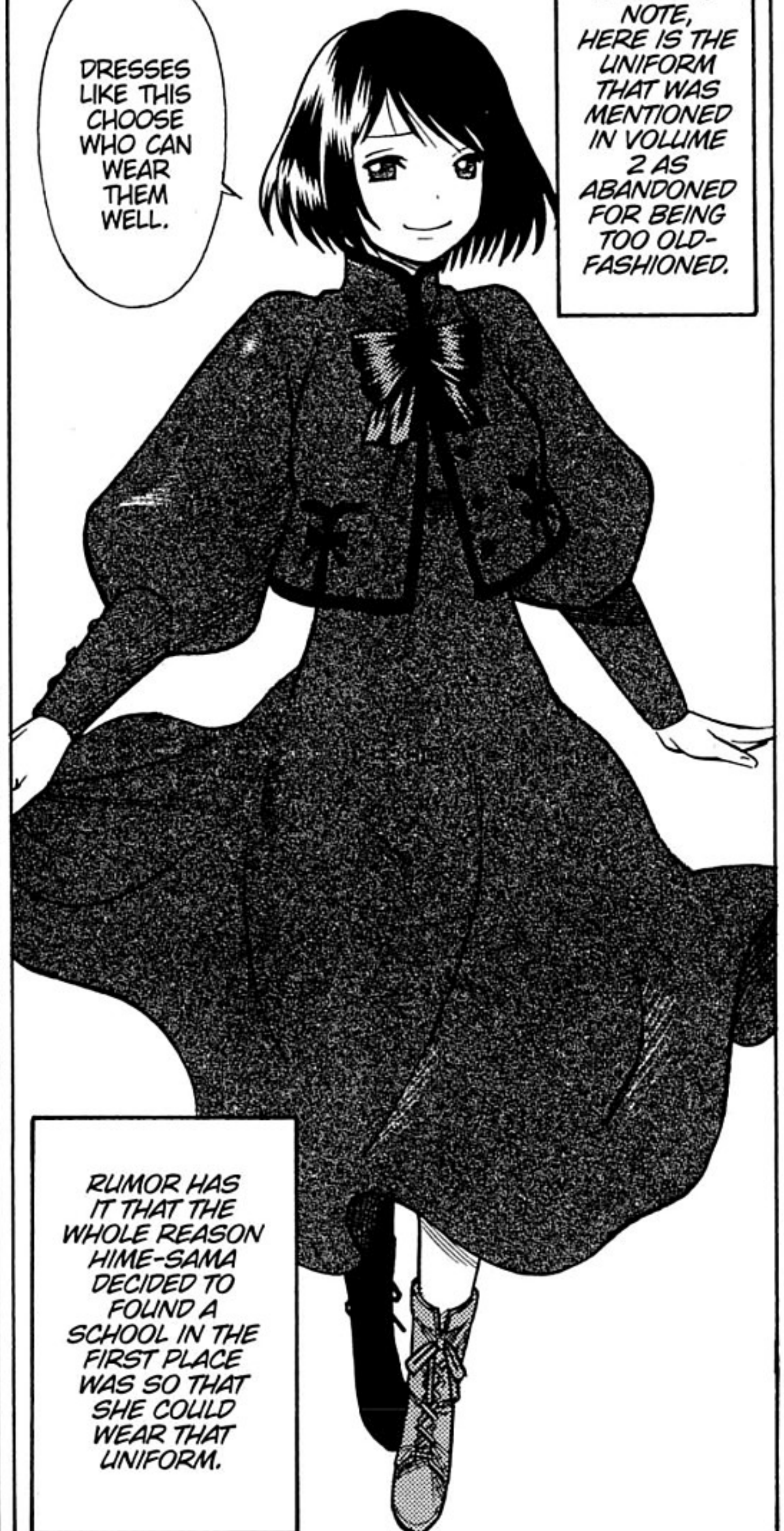
THAT IS WHY, AS OF VOLUME 3, MINA-HIME IS ALWAYS WEARING A TIE WITH HER SCHOOL UNIFORM.

GIRLS BEING REQUIRED TO WEAR A TIE... WHAT A STRANGE AGE THIS IS.



HOWEVER, THE RIBBON SOON FELL OUT OF FASHION, AS MINA-HIME HERSELF-- DECLARING THAT THE DIRECTOR SHOULD NOT BE EXEMPT FROM THE SCHOOL'S DRESS CODE-- STOPPED WEARING ONE.

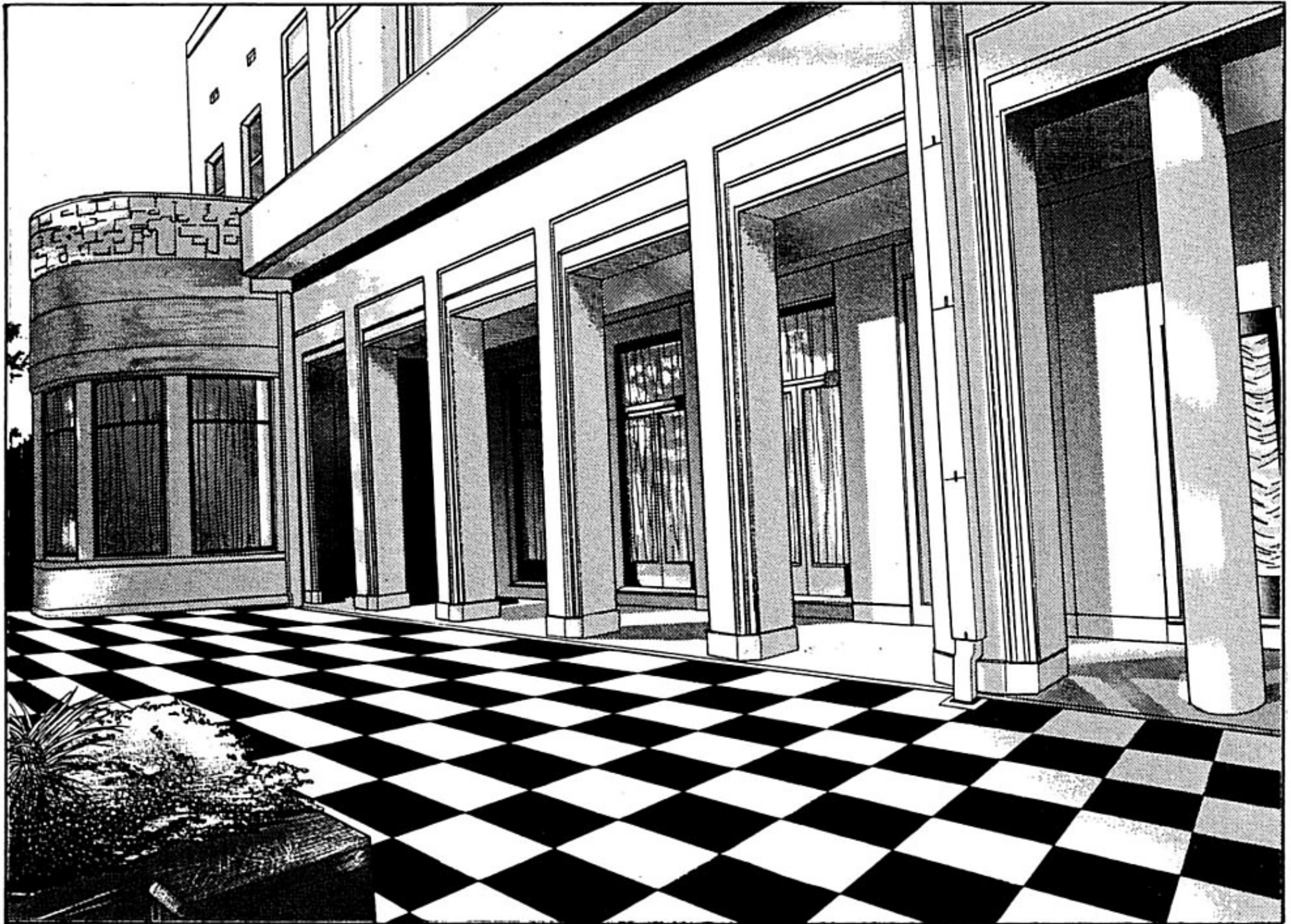
DRESSES LIKE THIS CHOOSE WHO CAN WEAR THEM WELL.



ON A SIDE NOTE, HERE IS THE UNIFORM THAT WAS MENTIONED IN VOLUME 2 AS ABANDONED FOR BEING TOO OLD-FASHIONED.

RUMOR HAS IT THAT THE WHOLE REASON HIME-SAMA DECIDED TO FOUND A SCHOOL IN THE FIRST PLACE WAS SO THAT SHE COULD WEAR THAT UNIFORM.

FOR SOMEONE WITH
A LIFESPAN AS LONG
AS HIME-SAMA'S,
HER TIME AS A
STUDENT AT THAT
SCHOOL PASSED
IN THE BLINK
OF AN EYE.



BUT THOSE DAYS SHONE
SO BRIGHTLY AND SO
STRONGLY THAT THEY
CONTINUED TO LIGHT HER
LIFE--NEVER FADING--
UNTIL THE VERY END.

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

STIGMA

\stig-mə\

- astigmatism. Blurred vision caused by irregular focus within the lens of the eye.
- stigma (Ϛ). A combination of the Greek letters sigma and tau.
- Leprosy stigma. Social rejection of a person with leprosy.
- A brand or mark burned into the skin of a criminal or slave.
- Bodily marks or wounds resembling the crucifixion wounds of Jesus Christ.
- Artificial human blood developed and sold by Italy's Lorenzo Pharmaceuticals.

Compatible with all blood types, it is often referred to as the “universal blood type,” and is used across the world. It was originally developed as a food source for vampires.^[*citation needed*]

(Taken from Wikipedia)

CONNIE

(Konkana Chakravarti)

From the 19th century Mughal Empire (now India), Connie works as a "Cleaner"--a group of vampires who clean up the surface level of the Bund during daylight hours. She acts relatively normal, but is in fact a psychotic killer, riddled by fever dreams of her lover who was killed by soldiers of the British Empire. She is an expert shot with the bow.

First appearance: "On the Hunt"



MACK

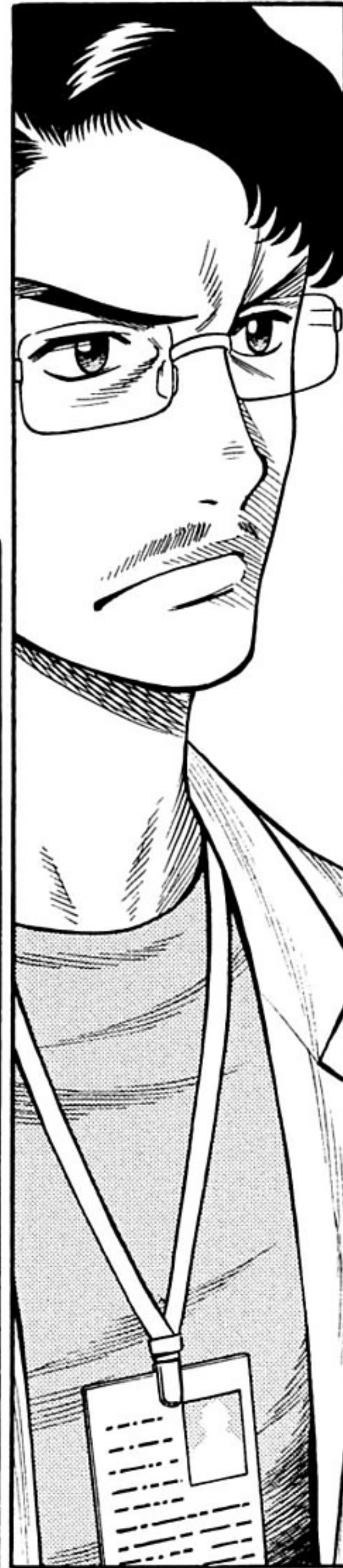
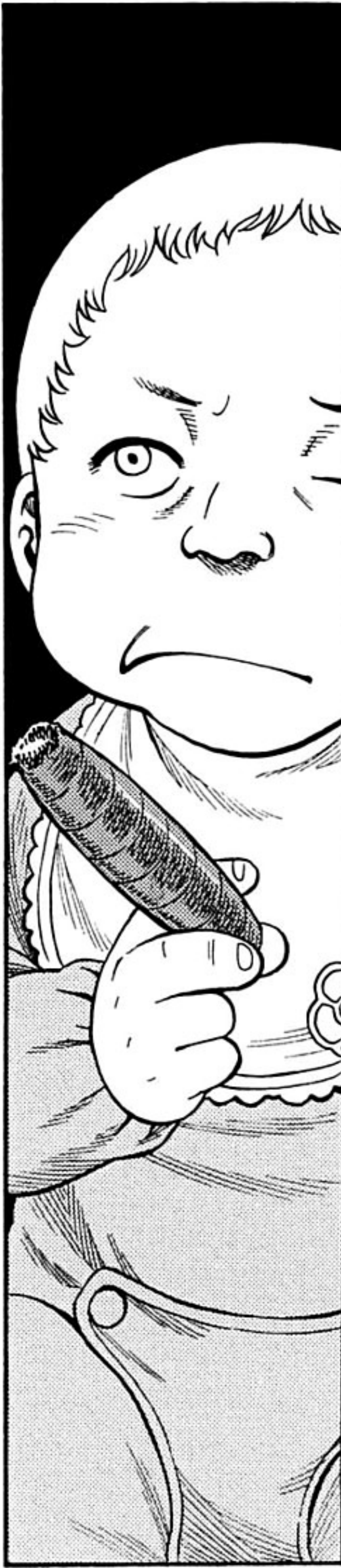
Left homeless during the Great Depression, Mack was bit by Harvey and is now his bodyguard. Though he looks like a young boy, he is an exceptional fighter. "Mack" is a nickname. His true name is unknown.

First appearance: "Les Infantes Terribles"

HARVEY

Though he looks like an infant, Harvey is over 100 years old. An influential member of Bund low society, he is the unofficial guardian of some of the Bund's residential districts. With government approval, he works to defuse tensions between the Bund's different ethnic groups. He's good enough at it that even Queen Mina respects his ability. He loves cigars of all kinds. The first person he bit was Mack.

First appearance: "Death of a Salaryman"



DANIEL KAZUO SAJI

A dentist at the Bund's Medical Center, Doctor Saji mostly handles fang-removal operations for vampires wishing to join the Fangless. A Japanese-American born in Hawaii during the early 20th century, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and fought in World War II. He is well respected, and enjoys helping others.

First appearance: "Endless Silence"

OLD MAN

A doctor specializing in hematology, he conducted a number of experiments on humans during his time as a Nazi in World War II. He was found by Mina after fleeing Germany at the end of the war. He is the only Tepes family retainer who is still human.

First appearance: "Night & Darkness"



RYUU

A faithful retainer to the Lord of Clan Li from ancient times to the present, Councilor Ryuu maintains a pleasant personality, in complete contrast to his job of running the Clan's dark underbelly. A rare "mind vampire," he does not drink blood. Instead, he can manipulate humans and leech off their mental energy.

First appearance: "Lies & Silence"

ANDREA BORGIANI

Son of a high-ranking Tepes aristocrat, Andrea's father was killed during the rebellion of the Three Great Clans. Acting as regent for the young Mina, he kept the fragmenting nobles of House Tepes together and plotted to return the royal family to its former glory. Intelligent and analytical, he specialized in covert warfare. He is also Alphonse's father.

First appearance: "A Flag Full of Stars"



VITTORIO SPALLANZANI

Born a low-ranking aristocrat in the 19th century, Vittorio rigorously studies hematology with the intent of creating gourmet artificial blood. Though highly intelligent, his narcissism and excessively chatty nature haven't given him the greatest of reputations.

First appearance: "Hematologie du Gout"

"I WILL GIVE A
THOUSAND
CAMELS TO THE
MAN WHO TELLS
ME THE RECIPE
FOR COCA-COLA,
OR THE
TECHNIQUE
FOR MAKING
STIGMA."



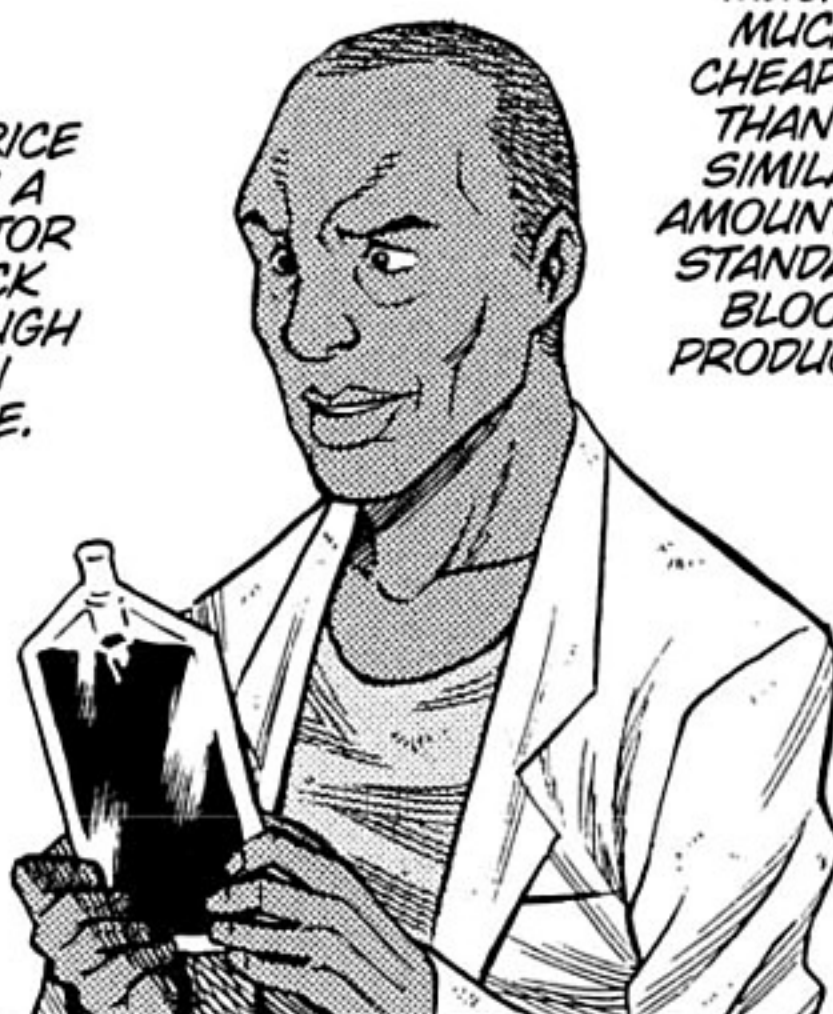
IN A NOW-
FAMOUS
JOKE, A
CERTAIN
ARABIAN
LEADER
ALLEGEDLY
SAID...



PERFECT FOR
BLOOD
TRANSFUSIONS.
DOCTORS
AND MEDICAL
CENTERS
ACROSS THE
WORLD LATCHED
ONTO IT LIKE A
MAN DYING OF
THIRST CLUTCHES
AT WATER.

COMPATI-
BLE WITH
ALL BLOOD
TYPES.
STABLE
ENOUGH
FOR LONG-
TERM
STORAGE.

STIGMA'S PRICE
POINT WAS A
MAJOR FACTOR
IN ITS QUICK
AND THOROUGH
ADOPTION
WORLDWIDE.

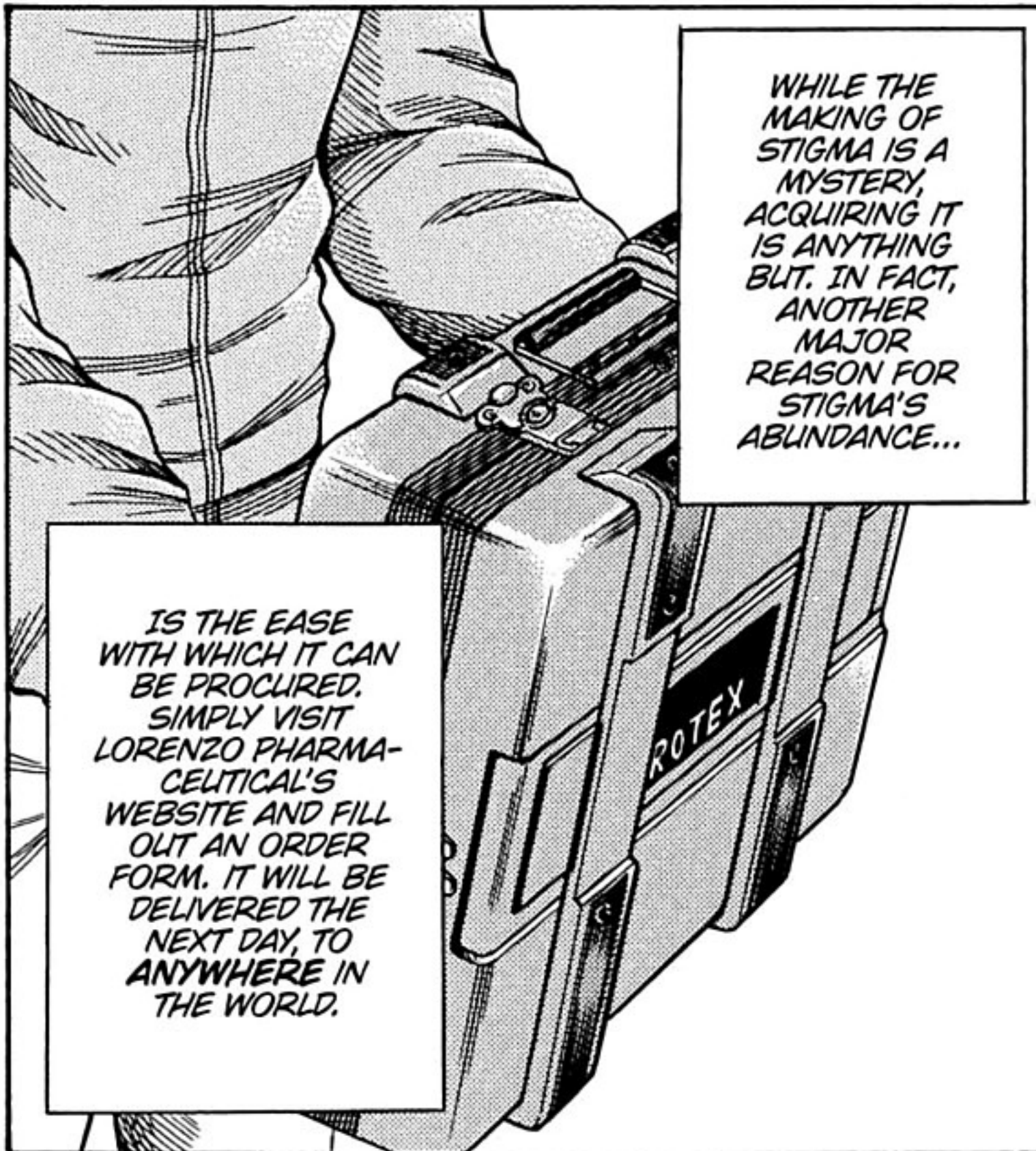


MUCH,
MUCH
CHEAPER
THAN A
SIMILAR
AMOUNT OF
STANDARD
BLOOD
PRODUCT...



STIGMA.
ARTIFICIAL
HUMAN
BLOOD.

MANUFACTURED
BY LORENZO
PHARMA-
CEUTICALS,
THIS
"UNIVERSAL
BLOOD"
CHANGED THE
WORLD.

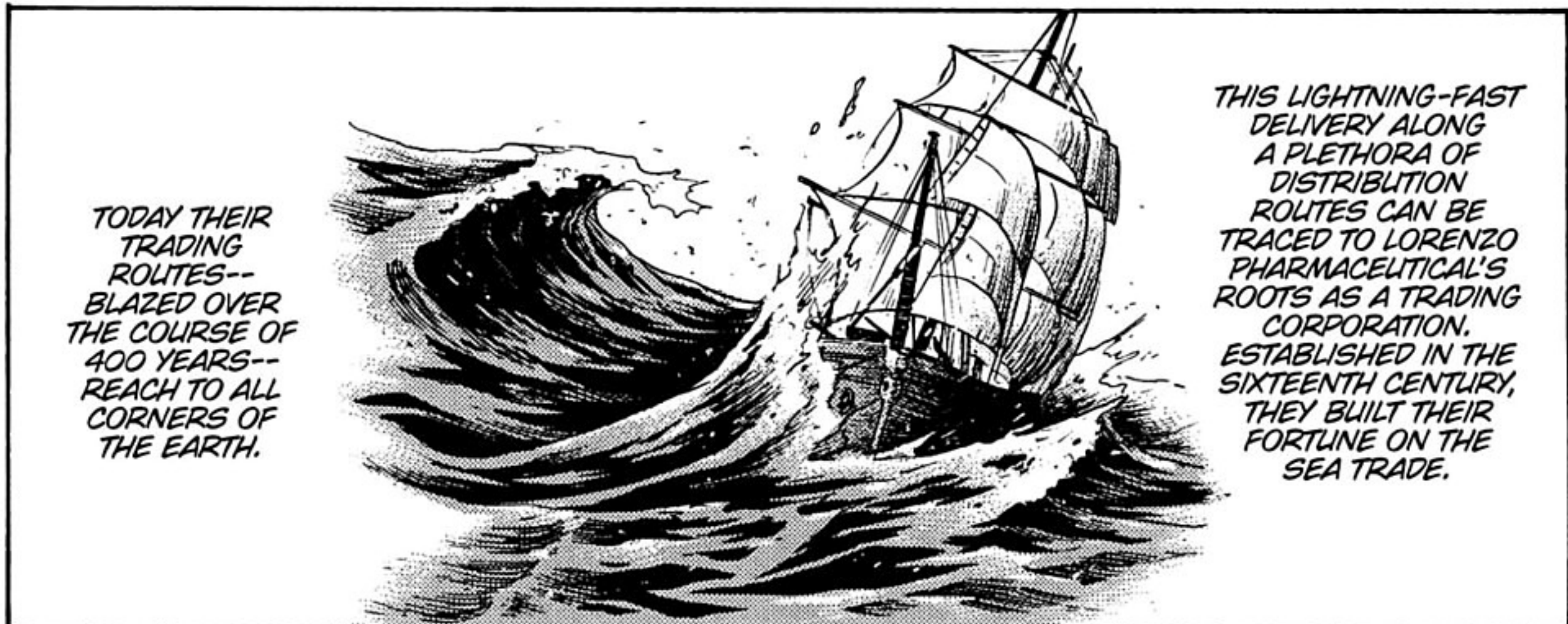
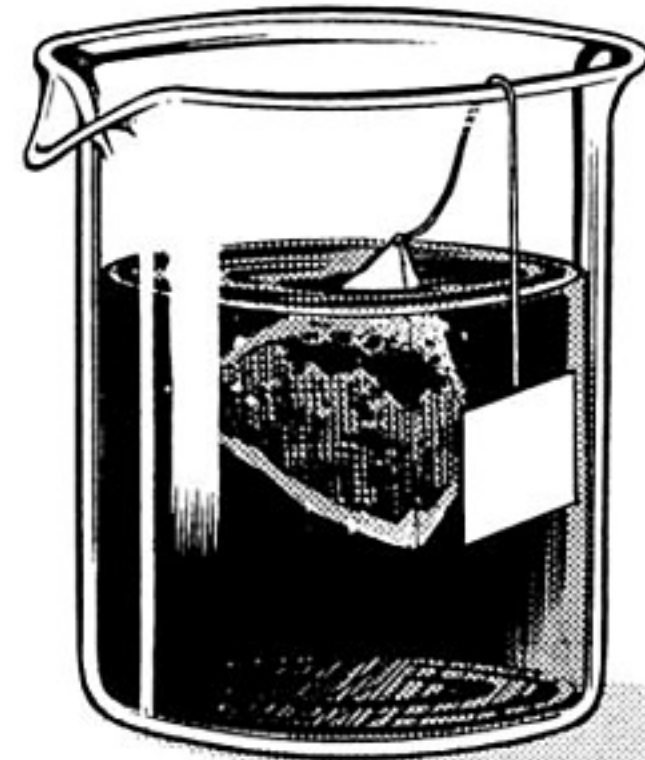


WHILE THE MAKING OF STIGMA IS A MYSTERY, ACQUIRING IT IS ANYTHING BUT. IN FACT, ANOTHER MAJOR REASON FOR STIGMA'S ABUNDANCE...

IS THE EASE WITH WHICH IT CAN BE PROCURED. SIMPLY VISIT LORENZO PHARMACEUTICAL'S WEBSITE AND FILL OUT AN ORDER FORM. IT WILL BE DELIVERED THE NEXT DAY, TO ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

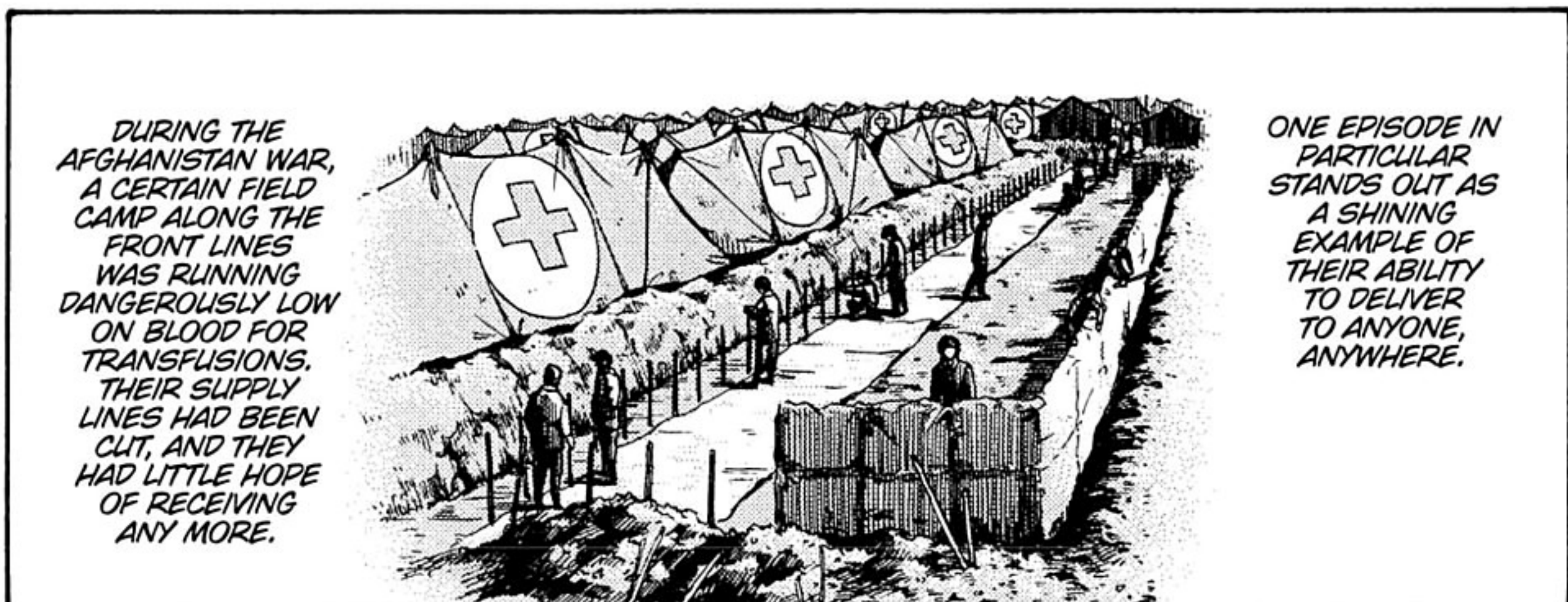
HOWEVER, THE TECHNIQUE FOR MAKING IT HAS BEEN KEPT COMPLETELY SECRET.

BESIDES THE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED JOKE, ANOTHER OFT-REPEATED BIT OF HUMOR IN REGARDS TO ITS RECIPE IS THAT IT IS MADE BY SIMPLY STEEPING A TEA BAG IN A BEAKER.



TODAY THEIR TRADING ROUTES-- BLAZED OVER THE COURSE OF 400 YEARS-- REACH TO ALL CORNERS OF THE EARTH.

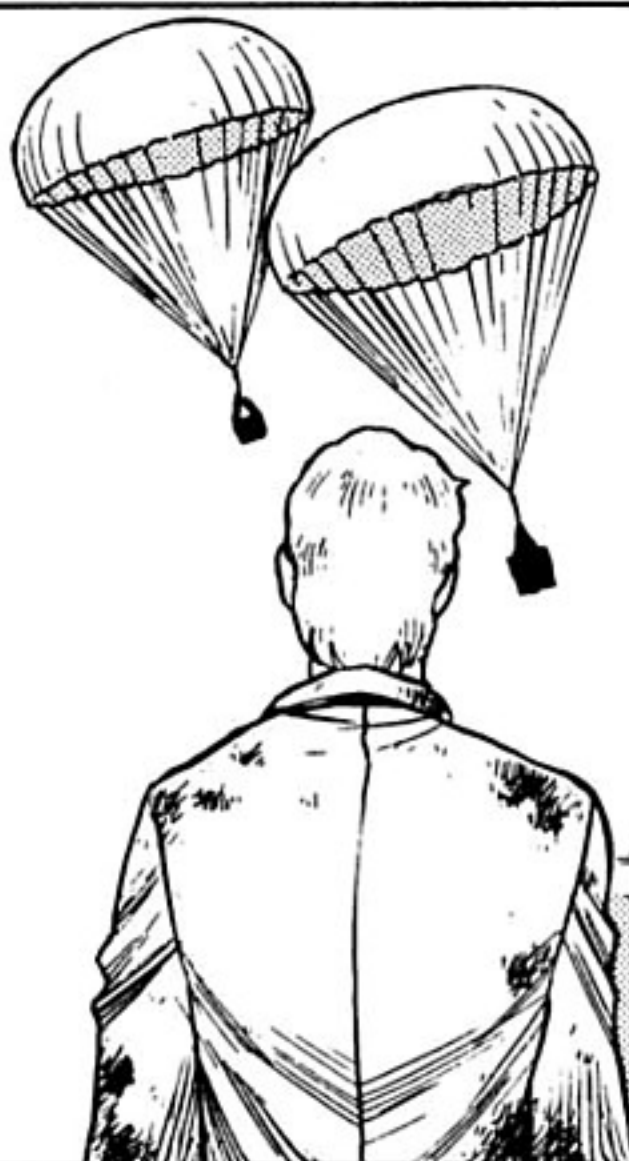
THIS LIGHTNING-FAST DELIVERY ALONG A PLETHORA OF DISTRIBUTION ROUTES CAN BE TRACED TO LORENZO PHARMACEUTICAL'S ROOTS AS A TRADING CORPORATION. ESTABLISHED IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, THEY BUILT THEIR FORTUNE ON THE SEA TRADE.



DURING THE AFGHANISTAN WAR, A CERTAIN FIELD CAMP ALONG THE FRONT LINES WAS RUNNING DANGEROUSLY LOW ON BLOOD FOR TRANSFUSIONS. THEIR SUPPLY LINES HAD BEEN CUT, AND THEY HAD LITTLE HOPE OF RECEIVING ANY MORE.

ONE EPISODE IN PARTICULAR STANDS OUT AS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF THEIR ABILITY TO DELIVER TO ANYONE, ANYWHERE.

TWO DAYS
LATER, SEVERAL
CONTAINERS
FULL OF
STIGMA WERE
PARACHUTED IN,
LANDING NOT
FAR FROM
THE CAMP'S
MEDIC TENT.



IN A FIT OF
FRUSTRATED
RAGE, ONE FIELD
SURGEON WENT
UP TO THE TOP
OF A SAND DUNE
AND SCRAWLED,
"WE NEED
STIGMA" IN
HUGE LETTERS
IN THE SAND.



BUT NOT
LONG AGO,
THAT SURGEON
WAS
INTERVIEWED,
AND HE
CONFIRMED
THAT THE
STORY WAS
ENTIRELY TRUE.



FOR A TIME,
THIS INCIDENT
WAS CONSIDERED
JUST ANOTHER
URBAN LEGEND,
LIKE THOSE
STORIES ABOUT A
CERTAIN LUXURY
CAR THAT DOES
NOT TRULY EXIST.

IT IS NO
OVERSTATEMENT
TO SAY THAT
THERE IS
NO ONE LEFT
ON EARTH
UNTOUCHED BY
ITS MIRACLE.



ALREADY,
STIGMA IS
BEING
PRAISED AS
MANKIND'S
GREATEST
INVENTION
OF THE 21ST
CENTURY.

*YET WE NEVER
KNEW...*

*"MANKIND'S"
GREATEST
INVENTION
WASN'T
CREATED FOR,
OR EVEN BY,
MANKIND
AT ALL...*

Dance in the Vampire Bund Side Story

NO DIFFERENT FLESH

Tikurakuran x GEMMA

&

Nozomu Tamaki

PART I

A sizzling red sun gradually descended upon the foreign sea. The boy beheld the ever-expanding Mediterranean before him, no longer the domain of Venice, his home. Of course, this was not news to him; indeed, it was a reality that had already been set in motion around the time of his own father's boyhood.

In the mid-sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire took control of the Eastern Mediterranean, robbing Venice of its position as the link between Asia and the West. This, together with the discovery of the East Indian sea route around the African horn, shifted control over Asian relations irrevocably into the hands of the Dutch and the Spanish. Now, the Venetians could only claim

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the Adriatic Sea as their own.

The boy stood on the caravel's deck—the ship was a valued asset of the Lorenzo Trading Company, run by his own father—and gazed out over the harbor. Far in the west, the dying sun backlit the blocky silhouette of the Citadel of Qaitbay, which sat atop the isle of Pharos. Was it true, the boy wondered, that an enormous lighthouse once stood in that citadel's spot?

Alexandria, like Venice, was a city in decline. Once upon a time, Mediterranean trade had flourished here, and it had been one of the largest points of import for Asian spices. But the heyday of trade had long since passed, and ship activity within the massive Alexandrian harbor had become a rarity.

At last, the final drop of sun disappeared beyond the horizon. A chill crept into the breeze that caressed the boy's cheek.

The breeze brought with it the unfamiliar echoes of chanting voices in the town. The words were incomprehensible to the boy, but he found himself listening intently to their distinct intonations. These were *adhan*—chants of worship coming from a mosque's spire. It was time for the Islamic sunset prayer.

It was also time for the boy's contact to arrive. He heard footsteps as his interpreter, Chan, approached.

"Young Master, he is here."

Several Muslim merchants dressed in billowy gowns

boarded the deck of the ship. They were the ones who had carried the boy's desired merchandise all the way here, from the Red Sea and through Cairo.

Behind the Muslim merchants followed another man. His appearance differed entirely from theirs—he was of considerably smaller stature, and wore a peculiar jacket and trousers, decorated here and there with intricate embroidery. From his yellow skin, chiseled facial features, and almond eyes, he was quite distinct from an Italian or an Egyptian.

More remarkable still was his head. It was utterly devoid of hair save for the very top, where he had grown it tremendously long and wore it in a braid that hung down his back.

Chan whispered to the boy. "He's a Jurchen of the Ming Northlands."

"Is his hair naturally like that?"

"No, I should think he shaves it that way. A custom unique to the Jurchens."

The boy gave a brief greeting to the Muslim merchants—with whom his family had close ties dating back several generations—then turned to the Chinese man. He introduced himself, and the Chinese man smiled and bowed deeply from the waist. He began speaking in Chinese. Chan translated into Italian for the boy.

"A pleasure to meet you. I am named Ryuu. It is my honor to make your acquaintance."

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The fact that the merchants had already made the journey to Alexandria meant the negotiations were already all but complete. There remained only one outstanding condition. The Chinese exporters had insisted on meeting in person to ask a question. The answer they received would determine whether or not they would be willing to do business.

Upon learning this, the Lorenzo Trading Company had dispatched the boy as their representative. His father had briefed him on the basic details regarding the merchandise in question. He told the boy as well to accept any new conditions they might set for the trade, and to avoid a breakdown in negotiations at all costs.

Leaving the Muslim merchants, who were now beginning their evening worship, the boy ushered Ryu into the inner cabin of the ship. Ryu maintained a cheerful grin, marveling at the boat and showering the boy with flattery.

Ryu and the boy sat across from one another at a table in the cabin, dimly illuminated by lamplight. Chan sat by the boy's side.

To the boy's shock, Ryu sat all alone, with no interpreter. This was unheard of at a business negotiation between foreign merchants. It was standard practice to bring along one's own interpreter to ensure that the other person's interpreter wasn't mistakenly being unclear, or worse, purposely twisting words.

"Are you in need of an interpreter?" the boy asked.

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Chan translated into Chinese, and Ryu calmly shook his head.

“No need. I trust yours.”

He produced a red silk pouch from his breast pocket, and emptied its contents onto the table. They were long, slender dried leaves, reddish-black like old blood, with pointed tips. The boy thought the leaves might have been thicker and a more vivid shade of red when freshly plucked. In any case, this was the merchandise Lorenzo Trading Company was so anxious to secure.

Maintaining his cheerful demeanor, Ryu straightened his posture and folded his hands upon the table. Seeing him from across the table, he was positioned directly under the yellow lamplight, his eyes obscured by shadow.

Chan listened to Ryu speak and then translated into Italian. “What I wish to know first is how you learned of this plant.”

The boy answered as he’d been instructed. “It was amongst some spice samples brought in by a Venetian merchant, an acquaintance of my father’s.”

“We’ve never exported this. It’s amazing that you even discovered us,” Ryu said.

“We searched far and wide. Chan has merchant relatives in Fujian, and we were able to find you through those connections.”

“I wonder why you do not employ the East Indian sea route.”

“If we had to go through Dutch merchants, we could kiss any profits goodbye.”

The boy looked at Ryu's eyes. Though they'd been obscured by shadows only moments ago, now they were clearly visible. They were narrow, like they'd been slashed into Ryu's long face with a scalpel. The black pupils firmly returned the boy's gaze.

“To be honest, I've let our negotiations come this far without ever asking you the most important thing. I'd like to ask you that directly, here and now.” Ryu leaned toward the boy. “What do you intend to do with this plant?”

Naturally, this question had been anticipated.

“To sell it as medicine, of course.”

“Has the Lorenzo Trading Company ever dealt in medicine before?”

“No, this would be the first time.”

“Then I suppose it stands to reason that you wouldn't know. My people have known of this plant for centuries, but as a matter of fact, it has no medicinal properties. Not for humans, anyway.”

Here, the boy took note of something odd. Chan's interpretation of Ryu's words had suddenly improved. Until now, Chan had waited for Ryu to finish talking before translating for the boy. That was indeed how translation tended to work. But now Chan had begun interpreting before Ryu was finished with his speech. It

was as though Chan were somehow anticipating Ryuu's words before he spoke them.

"Perhaps the Ming's medicinal practices are different from those of the Venetians. At Lorenzo, we would mix this herb with several other ingredients and use it to treat anemia," the boy explained, repeating the words his father had told him. He lacked the knowledge to say anything more on the subject.

Ryuu's eyes loomed even brighter than before. One could almost swear they were actually emitting light.

"Anemia, you say... I see, I see," he said, stifling laughter.

The boy was suddenly struck with an odd sensation. It was as though something unseen had crawled out of Ryuu's hands as they sat resting upon the table, and wriggled up into the boy's head. His body lurched violently. Chan sat impassively, offering no reaction.

Ryuu, meanwhile, looked over both of them warmly. "Let us go on. Please answer each question without withholding anything."

Chan was now translating in perfect unison with the movements of Ryuu's lips. It was as though Ryuu was using Chan's mouth to speak Italian directly. Chan's gaze had grown hollow. Save for the words he was speaking, there was no sign of consciousness in the man.

The boy was unperturbed by this. Of more immediate concern was the desire swelling inside his chest to please

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Ryuu by answering his questions to the fullest extent of his capability.

Ryuu now shook off his prior cordiality and launched into a rapid-fire interrogation. “Does Lorenzo Trading Company keep any cattle?”

“No, we have none.”

“Goats?”

“None.”

“Sheep?”

“None.”

“What about pigs?”

“We keep *no* livestock!”

“Very well. Does Lorenzo Trading Company make its own wine?”

“No.”

“Cheese?”

“No.”

“Do you produce any fermented foods of any kind?”

“No, nothing of the sort.”

Ryuu’s questioning went on at length. His mouth had all but stopped moving entirely, the entire conversation now being facilitated by Chan and the boy. At times, he would have the same question asked repeatedly in different ways, or have Chan answer his own questions.

The boy could tell his mind was being toyed with, but he felt neither fear nor discomfort. Though he didn’t grasp the intention behind Ryuu’s questions, he

answered away with a swelling sense of joy.

Finally, the two voices began to fade and dwindle, and Ryuû let out a sigh. “That seems to be everything. You’ve started to repeat yourselves.”

The boy’s head suddenly grew light. He planted his hands on the table to steady himself, feeling as though he might collapse otherwise.

“Very well. Let us complete our transaction,” Ryuû smiled, ignoring the boy’s dire condition. The boy, at last released from his spellbound state, stared at Ryuû in petrified terror. Ryuû’s luminous eyes had once again sunken into the shadows. “When dawn comes, I will hand over the cargo. You also have my word that I will continue to supply you with the herb. You may consult the Egyptian gentlemen as to the specific details. I look forward to a long and prosperous relationship.”

Ryuû rose and bowed deeply.

“I know the way back, so please don’t trouble yourself. Thank you for the meal.”

With those baffling words, Ryuû turned and exited the cabin, his glossy black braid whipping behind him. Chan and the boy sat in a daze, unable to even see him off.

“...Are you all right? What just happened?” the boy said weakly.

Chan feebly shook his head. “It’s as if... that man’s will entered my head before his words even entered my ears. I understood everything—even words I’d never heard

before. And then my mouth just moved of its own accord... I'm afraid I'm quite perplexed." Chan placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "More importantly, are *you* all right, Young Master? Your face is frightfully pale."

"I'm... not sure. I know I wasn't coerced, but for some reason, I felt powerfully compelled to tell him everything. What do you suppose he was trying to find out?"

It was a full week following the negotiation in Alexandria when the caravel—now loaded with medicinal herbs—arrived back in Venice via the Mediterranean. A week in the sun had restored the boy to health, and now the warm smile of his father greeted him. Without returning the smile, however, the boy hastily made his way to his father's side.

"Father, there's something I must discuss with you." His father nodded silently, no sign of surprise on his face. It was as though he had anticipated these words from his son.

Once the two were alone in the study, the boy recounted his entire bizarre encounter with Ryu.

"What happened, Father? Just what did that Chinaman do to me?"

The man dropped his gaze to his hands, folded upon the desk. He remained silent and unmoving. The boy, unable to bear the silence, opened his mouth to speak again, and his father finally met his gaze.

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“I know the answer to your question, my son,” he said. “But I cannot share it with you now. Be content with the knowledge that not only your life and mine, but those of countless others rested upon your completing that transaction. More lives than you can possibly imagine.”

It was here that the boy noticed for the first time the distress in his father’s eyes. This was different from his concern over the decline of Venice or his wariness of the rapidly-ascending Dutch. This was a secret burden, far greater than anything he could possibly imagine, to repeat his father’s own words.

“One day, you will succeed me as the head of Lorenzo, and on that day, I promise you, I will tell you everything. Until then, please trust me and ask no more questions. I need you to be my strength.”

The boy looked his father firmly in the eye. “...Yes, Father.”

“You’ve had a long journey. Let Giorgio unpack the cargo tomorrow. Tonight, you should go back to the pay desk and rest up.”

“No, Father. The unpacking is part of my duty. Please leave it to me. I can rest when my work is done,” the boy said.

The father smiled slightly and gave a nod. “...Very well, then. So be it.”

“Good night, Father.” The boy stood up from his chair and made for the door.

“Carlo,” the father called out, rising as well.

The boy, Carlo, stopped himself in the doorway and turned back. His father walked to him and embraced him in his thick arms.

“I’m glad you came back safe,” he said, lips pressed to his son’s ear.

“...Father.”

“I’m so proud of you, my son.”

The man lingered there for a moment after Carlo made his exit. Then at length, he composed himself, and made his way through a door leading to the adjacent room. In the middle of this room, two men sat at a large table. The center of the table was stacked high with samples of the newly-arrived herbs, which the men were examining.

“‘More lives than you can possibly imagine. I need you to be my strength,’” mimicked one of the men, looking up from the medicine. He appeared to be a bit older than Carlo’s father, and exuded an air of grandeur.

“Lord Pietro. I can’t help but think of Austria.”

Taking an empty seat, Pietro smiled and shook his head. “I still have nightmares about that place, Lord Scott.”

“I was just about Carlo’s age at that time,” said the other man. Unlike the elderly Pietro and Scott, he was still young—scarcely older than Carlo. He had a lean, slender physique, and well-composed facial features.

“Yes,” Pietro smiled, “and as I recall, you looked precisely the same age as you do now.”

Scott's humorless facade cracked into a smile. "Lord Andrea was already well past sixty by then. Hadn't I told you?"

All three men laughed heartily. This was the sincere laughter of dear friends who had endured years of triumphs and tragedies together. It had been more than thirty years since the clash of the Rozenmann, Ivanovic, and Li clans had left the House of Tepes devastated. Andrea, a vampire; Scott, a werewolf; and Pietro, a human: the three had overcome their differences and joined forces, their battle wearing on for years.

For his part, Andrea had focused on building a network of retainers that spanned across Europe. Lord Scott had gone to great lengths in seeking out the werewolf clans throughout the world in order to rebuild the annihilated Beowulf military force. Meanwhile, Pietro, in accordance with his late father Lorenzo's last will and testament, focused his efforts on procuring the resources needed to keep the remnants of House Tepes afloat. All of this was carried out with the aim of one day reviving the house and summoning Queen Mina—currently secreted away in the Ottoman capital of Constantinople—back to Europe.

"We were right to send Carlo," Pietro said, his expression growing serious once again.

Lord Scott nodded. "Indeed. After all, the boy can't cough up information he hasn't got, no matter how much that creature loosened his lips."

The three had first discovered Ryuu's mind control abilities at the time of House Tepes' destruction. The night before the castle fell, Ryuu had appeared there, unarmed, diverted the attention of the lookout guards, and made his way as far as Lucrezia's room. Carlo, who knew little of the circumstances surrounding the herbal medicine deal, had been sent so that their reasons for buying it would go undiscovered by Ryuu.

After the fall of House Tepes, the surviving vampire retainers had scattered across the breadth of Europe. With Andrea's tireless efforts, they had established enough of a foundation to allow them to live independently, but the longer they stayed in hiding, the more they faced a deadly problem.

It was hunger.

They had managed to keep themselves alive for some time by drinking the blood of livestock—goats and sheep—but in the end, this could not sustain them. It was only a matter of time before the exiled vampires would succumb to their instinctive hunger and bite a human. Vampires aren't ones to be tamed, not once they've developed a taste for blood. And if they laid a finger on humans, word was sure to spread. If it spread as far as the Rozenmann and Ivanovic clans, who now controlled all of Europe, the remaining Tepes vampires would surely be hunted down and slaughtered.

The Stigma production facilities that had served as

House Tepes' lifeline were all destroyed when the clan itself was broken and scattered. The artificial blood required a long brewing process, as well as a particular herb. Andrea and his associates strove to rebuild the facilities, but the plantations for cultivating this most important of resources had nearly all been destroyed by Rozenmann. Given how scattered and hidden they were, generating even the smallest amounts of Stigma would be a struggle.

Andrea and his associates had given up on procuring these resources within Europe. They expanded their tireless search for this plant into distant Asia, leading them to the discovery of its growth in a southern Chinese province, under the control of Clan Li.

Of course, gathering the plant there without Li's permission would unquestionably lead to a dire and irreversible outcome. Andrea had thus devised a cunning plan to purchase the plant "fair and square" from Clan Li. Thanks to Carlo's flawless fulfillment of the proxy role, they had managed to successfully complete the trade agreement. This would allow them to procure enough of the herb...for now.

"Do you suppose we've really pulled the wool over Ryu's eyes?" Pietro asked Andrea.

"I wouldn't get my hopes up," the vampire said flatly. "At best, Ryu has decided to overlook this for the time being."

“‘Overlook’ it?” Scott raised an eyebrow.

Andrea nodded. “Even supposing Carlo did convince him, he’ll have lingering suspicions toward the Lorenzo Trading Company. For now, this deal offers no direct threat to their dominion, not to mention it’s increasing their wealth, so it’s not in their best interest to strike at us. It’s very likely that Ryu has seen entirely through our ruse, and is just waiting for the right time to exploit the plant as a negotiating chip.”

“In that case, we must hurry to begin cultivation here. We’d be wise not to linger at the mercy of Clan Li for long,” Pietro said.

Scott leaned forward. “As a matter of fact, Wolfgang was recently successful in persuading the Ayutthaya Clan to cooperate with us. Some of them have seen the plant growing wild within China.”

Andrea stroked his chin. “That may provide some hints as to how to cultivate it. Lord Scott, please tell Lord Wolfgang to bring them here at once.

“As you wish.” Scott bowed his head. “Additionally, we’ve discovered a promising potential place to serve as our research base. West of here, at—”

“That’s enough,” Pietro interjected, putting a hand up. “I shouldn’t learn the specific location, lest I ever succumb to Ryu’s interrogation.”

Andrea nodded and said nothing.

“Still,” Pietro sighed, flipping through the pages of

the ledger book brought back by Carlo, “those Chinese merchants are certainly gouging us.”

“Let money be no object,” Andrea said. “It can’t replace the lost lives of our men.”

Scott nodded. “Lord Dermaille will find some way to make ends meet, even if it means a bit of smoke and mirrors. I hear Dutch tulips fetch a pretty sum these days.”

Pietro smiled wryly. “I’d like very much to invite that man here to Venice. It’s a shameful waste, having him stuck in Madrid to tend the coffers.”

The three shared another laugh, gazing upon the mountain of herbs stacked before them on the table.

By no means was this an end to their troubles; there were still many challenges to overcome. They needed to build a manufacturing facility to provide a stable source of Stigma, and it would need to be kept utterly secret. If they managed to succeed in creation of the facility, they would then need to distribute Stigma to their vassals, while evading the attention of the Three Great Clans. Nevertheless, for the homeless and masterless House Tepes, the surviving retainers were their one and only remaining asset. The future of Tepes rested on their safety. The three ringleaders had to keep moving forward.

“Lord Andrea,” Pietro said. “I wonder if I might be blunt for a moment.”

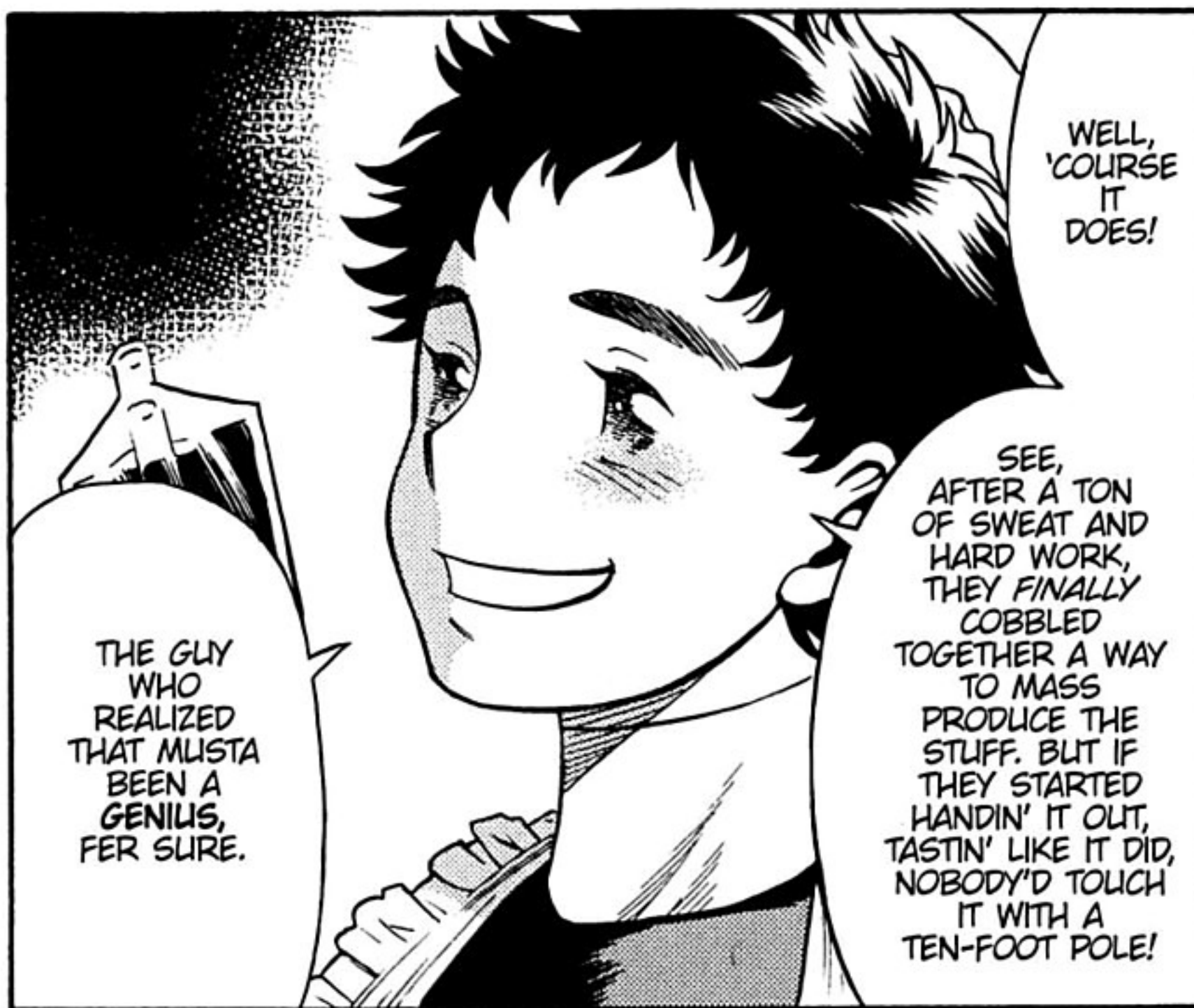
Andrea gestured his approval.

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“I’ve long witnessed the suffering of House Tepes, and I feel that when it comes to living in hiding, we humans have the advantage over vampires. You are immortal and fierce, but our short, fragile existence seems an easier yoke to bear.”

“Lord Pietro,” Andrea sighed. “*That* is the vampires’ stigma.”





PART 2

Spallanzani's journey began with a half-day's bus ride from Milano to the desolate lakeside village of Novate Mezzola, where he hired a horse-drawn carriage to make the next half-day's journey along a mountain road. He spent the night at a cottage along the way, and then continued his journey, now straying from the road on foot and relying on the position of the stars and mountain peak silhouettes to guide him for a three-hour trudge through snow and rocks.

The feet of the Alps were a remarkable sight to behold—jutting crags sandwiching large mounds of snow that reflected the bluish-white light of the moon. Pushing through the snow with his hands, Spallanzani arrived at

an iron door large enough for a single person to easily pass through. He pounded heavily on the door's red-rusted surface. After a bit, he heard sounds from within, and the door slowly opened inward with a loud creak.

Beyond the door, a cold, square, concrete passageway stretched into the darkness. At the front, a man dressed in a white coat held out his hands in greeting. "You're Professor Spallanzani, yes? Welcome to Bergamasque."

Vittorio Spallanzani was eighty-seven, as of this year. By vampire standards, this made him "young." He had been elated to receive an invitation to House Tepes' secret research center on a cold February evening, deep in the heart of winter. Being summoned to a research facility affiliated with the Queen was no different than a direct plea from Her Majesty to lend his wisdom. No vampire of Tepes blood would be less than overjoyed by such an honor. It was enough to make him drop everything and rush to the heart of the Alps.

"I am Cunningham, head of the Physiology Department. The mountain roads must have been very cold," the man introduced himself as they made their way through the concrete passageway. Beneath his lab coat, he wore a fashionable argyle sweater. He had a thick mustache and round-framed glasses. Though he wore a gentle smile, his gaze from behind the glasses held a glint of cold, as though taking stock of his guest.

"I would go to any length for Her Majesty. But I must

say, I didn't expect the facility to be so impressive."

"It speaks to the true power of Her Majesty. We may be in the middle of nowhere, but the facilities and equipment are all cutting edge."

"I can see my skills will be put to the test. And I simply must compliment you on the name 'Bergamasque.' How elegant."

"'Alps Secret Hematological Research Facility' would have been rather clunky, after all. Not to mention dull. And I'm sure you noticed how truly lovely the moonlight was on your way here."

They proceeded from the stark concrete passageway into a sterile hall lined with green linoleum, turning corner after corner until arriving before a door with a plate reading "Director's Office."

"It's Cunningham. I've brought Professor Spallanzani."

Despite being a Director's office, the room was spare and not particularly big, containing only a steel desk and matching steel bookcase. There wasn't even an additional chair, meaning any and all visitors were required to carry out their business standing up. This was the room of a man with zero interest in shooting the breeze with friends, and that man sat now on the other side of the steel desk, silently sizing Spallanzani up.

He was gaunt, as though his skin had been stretched out directly over bone. His appearance suggested a man of around sixty. He had a prominent but thin brow,

and a hawklike nose. His movements were sharp and economical, like the cracking of a steel whip. His gaze was smoldering—almost enough to make one question his sanity. Spallanzani's first impression was of a hungry bird of prey.

"Your name," he said, cutting off any introduction.

Having mentally prepared a number of greetings for himself, Spallanzani was caught off guard and promptly forgot them all. "Baronet Vittorio Spallanzani."

"Place of birth?"

"Siena."

"Age? To the best of your recollection."

"Eighty-seven this year."

"You're young."

"Is that bad?"

"No, entirely fine."

The Director spoke with a rather heavy Germanic accent. He set his paperwork aside and picked up a different packet of paper, flicking it with the back of a finger.

"What do you suppose is the current problem with Stigma?"

"Surely the flavor."

"The... flavor?" The Director's impassive brow twitched for the first time.

"It goes without saying at this point, but Stigma has a foul taste. Terribly so. Were it not Her Majesty's orders to

do so, no one could possibly live off it. If Stigma has one downside, I feel this is it.”

After a moment’s silence, Professor Cunningham burst out laughing. “This will do. We’ve never had someone try to make Stigma taste good. Director, I’ll look after this man.”

“That was the plan to begin with. Have Doctor Cunningham show you the way,” the still stoic-faced Director said with a tiny wave of the hand—apparently signaling the end of their interview.

“You made his brow twitch at your very first meeting. That’s impressive. You’ve got a promising future here.” Professor Cunningham patted Spallanzani on the shoulder as they made their way through the hallway past the living quarters. “You’ll be working for my team. For the first week, we’ll just have you observe each department and study what they do. By the way, do you like movies?”

“Movies? Those human things? No, I rarely watch them.”

“What a shame. They should hardly be dismissed because they’re a human creation. On the contrary, they’re quite entertaining. I’m something of a film collector, actually, and we occasionally hold a film club here. What do you say?”

“Ah. Could I possibly ask you something?”

“What’s that?”

“I didn’t catch the name of that Director just now.”

“Director.”

“Yes, but his name...”

“Nobody knows his name. He’s the only Director here, so you can call him Director.” Cunningham stopped and grinned at the dumbfounded Spallanzani. “Well, that third door is your room. The next film club meetup is Friday at dawn. Any requests?”

The first thing Spallanzani learned at Bergamasque was just how insignificant his education was. Though he prided himself on his more than sixty years of relentless research in the field of hematology, starting in his boyhood, it took no time for him to realize how unremarkable that was. This facility was teeming with individuals boasting study credentials that spanned centuries.

“Stigma’s history is extremely short. It began during the reign of Roman emperor Manuel I, when a false monastery in Khalkis began drinking a fermented concoction of pig’s blood mixed with medicinal plants. But as I hear it, this was nothing more than a supplement, and certainly not enough to sustain vampiric existence on its own.”

Spallanzani apologetically stifled a yawn through clenched jaw as Professor Rushd mumbled through his lecture, busying his withered fingers with a large cauldron. The mere idea that this man could write off history dating back to the eleventh century as “short” was truly incredible. His lecture, on the other hand, was

beginning to feel at least eleven centuries long.

“Over time, many scholars made improvements to the formula, until by the fifteenth century it was essentially identical to the Stigma of today. The development of the low-temperature dual electrolysis method by Lualdi of Venice was responsible for the creation of the first true blood substitute—that is, a substance that could be used as a vampire’s sole form of sustenance. In order to escape persecution by the church, they originally referred to it as *Stagma*—that is, the Greek word for ‘candy drops.’ In later generations, it was abbreviated to just the first letter of the word—*Stigma* (ς)—a practice which continues to this day.”

“Does that mean that fifteenth-century Stigma tasted sweet?”

Professor Rushd shot Spallanzani a glare. “The taste is irrelevant.”

“Oh, but it isn’t. Quite the contrary—as vampires, we have a natural appetite for blood of an exquisite flavor, and that carries over to blood substitutes as well.”

Spallanzani received such a nasty look that he thought Professor Rushd might set him on fire, so he refrained from elaborating further.

“Spallanzani... Any relation to Professor Lazzaro Spallanzani?”

“Lazzaro was my grandfather.”

“That takes me back. Has two centuries already passed since I heard him lecture at the University of Pavia?” Professor Ionesco, the oldest member and Associate Director of Bergamasque said, narrowing his eyes.

Spallanzani felt a rush of pleasure welling in his chest. The fact that he shared a bloodline with Lazzaro Spallanzani, renowned biologist of eighteenth-century Italy, was his greatest source of pride. “It’s an honor to hear that. Back at my home, there are lecture transcripts left over from his day. Please do come visit and see them sometime.”

“Mm-hm. By the way, about your theory on using phosphoric acid concentration to control coagulation in guinea pig blood...”

“Yes, I’d like to devise an experiment.”

“I’m afraid the outlook doesn’t look so good. I’m told the same experiment was conducted by a group in England two hundred years ago, with poor results.”

“Two hundred years?!”

“There should be a record of it in the library. Have a look.” Professor Ionesco spoke softly, pen moving restlessly in his fingers. “The oldest essays on nutritional physiology date back to the twelfth century, with cases of research on flavor appearing in the Orient in the mid-fourteenth century, albeit on a small scale. Research cases on the issue of erythropoietin metamorphism also appear here and there throughout Eastern Europe, starting in the

seventeenth century. Devising an original study is no easy task, Spallanzani.”

“The nutritional value of Stigma is determined by three factors: the binding rate of fibrinogen, the concentration of giemsa, and the amount of pseudo-hemoglobin. Obviously, the most important aspect of Stigma is its nutritional value, but since vampire physiology is rife with mysteries, for generations we’ve had to rely on empirical rule alone. It was in the wake of the so-called “Spanish Incident” of 1812, wherein there was a rapid string of cases of abnormal body transformation, that people began trying to address this problem. It was the famous Lord Palacios who determined that this was caused by an imbalance in Stigma’s ingredients, which paved the way to great advancements in the field of nutritional science. In a bold move, he took a new post as a professor at the University of Seville, allowing him to use humans to carry out his research on a larger scale.

“These accomplishments later earned him the rank of Marquis, but sadly, he lost his life during World War I. He was my own master, infallible both in intelligence and character, truly worthy of the title of “Great Sage,” only to be done in tragically by a stray bullet through the heart. If only he... if only...”

As Spallanzani listened to Professor Dufresne’s voice quiver with emotion, he began to feel vaguely uneasy.

Dufresne had the look of a young man in his twenties, but upon close inspection, little cracks could be seen at the corners of his eyes and on the tips of his fingers. This was what happened to a vampire's skin after centuries of neglecting one's own health, and Spallanzani knew from experience that such vampires were the most dangerous type. Indeed, Dufresne was oblivious to the beaker he had just crushed in his shaking hand. Spallanzani tried to subtly slink out of his chair, only to be pinned down by an angry glare, like an owl trapping its prey.

"Where are you going? I'm not finished. You don't care about Lord Palacios? You don't want to know what it was like for him to visit the smoldering wreckage of war-torn Paris? You want to tear me apart from my master, like all of the others? You... you..."

"Eeeyaaah!"

"That is unfortunate. Professor Dufresne is a brilliant man, but his emotions do get the best of him. It's been more than sixty years since the passing of Lord Palacios, and he's still a wreck. Granted, nearly all of us are rather emotional." Cunningham smiled as he joyfully inspected his film reel.

"He was very informative, at least," Spallanzani sighed as he stacked the final chair in the corner of the room. He knew Cunningham was a film buff, but he hadn't imagined there would be screenings every single day. As the newest

member of the club, Spallanzani had been volunteered by Cunningham to help out, in exchange for being his orientation guide. As a result, he'd become incredibly knowledgeable about movies, despite an utter lack of interest. He wondered if the surprisingly high number of participants was a sign that the people here in these mountains were starved for entertainment.

"Movies are a wonderful thing. They provide a window into the minds of humans. Besides, it's possible to admire the majesty of the sun when you see it on film." Cheerfully, he returned the filmstrip to its casing.

Today's movie was called *The Italian's Job* or something to that effect, and contained many car chases. It had been decades since Spallanzani had enjoyed the scenic sites of Torino in the afternoon, so in a sense he could see the truth in Cunningham's words.

"Doctor Cunningham, I'd like you to visit the greenhouse tomorrow. Those *Dracaenas* should be starting to bloom," ordered the Director, as he donned his coat and pulled a hat over his eyes. He was the last one still lingering after the movie.

"Yes, sir. Are you heading out for a walk?"

"They say the skies are clear today for a change. If the air is good, I should be able to see as far as Novate Mezzola."

The Director waved his cane as Spallanzani saw him out. He yawned. It was time for sleep already. Only an oddball would go for a stroll at this hour.

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND

He glanced at the clock on the wall. He pulled out his pocket watch. He glanced back at the wall clock.

“Professor Cunningham, what time is it now?”

Cunningham compared the time on the wall to the time on his own watch, and gave Spallanzani a dubious look. “Almost 6:30. Is something the matter?”

“So, it’s morning now, right?”

“Yes...”

“Exactly where is the Director planning to take his walk?”

Cunningham stared blankly at him for a moment, then a smile spread across his face. “Ahhh, you still don’t know. The Director is a human.”

Spallanzani’s vision went blank. His blood flow reversed direction. “You’ve got to be kidding me!” His shriek split the film screening room, but Cunningham merely smiled glibly in return. “A human?! You’re telling me the Director of one of the most elite research organizations in the world—the one responsible for keeping us alive—is *human*?! What kind of sick joke is this?!”

“I understand your concern, but do calm down. There used to be others here who felt that way.”

“Used to be?! Why hasn’t he been kicked out?! By what authority was a human mongrel placed above us?!”

“Why, by that of Her Majesty, the Queen. What other authority is there?”

“...!”

“Oh, but that doesn’t mean we’re just following along because of her orders. You’ll soon understand that the Director is...”

Cunningham went on, but his words fell on deaf ears.

It was only about an hour later that the Director returned from his walk, and Spallanzani immediately barged into his office.

“Oh, it’s you. Appreciated your help earlier. Are you getting used to things around the facility?”

“That’s not why I’m here. Is it true you’re a human?”

The Director showed a bit of surprise as he removed his coat. He then bared his teeth at Spallanzani. “You mean you didn’t notice? Look.”

In the place of fangs were normal human canines. Spallanzani’s blood reversed direction once again. “Why have I been assigned beneath a human? What kind of trick have you played on the Queen?”

The Director hung up his coat with a sigh, gently brushing off snow. “All right then, here’s a question. Does my being a human inconvenience you in some way?”

“Obviously! Do you think it’s acceptable for a vampire organization to have a human as their leader?!”

“I ask again, how does this inconvenience you?”

“Here’s one way,” Spallanzani suppressed his rage and spoke as politely as possible. “Is there anybody at this research facility with less experience than you?”

“Could be. Don’t know,” the Director answered casually. His attitude irritated Spallanzani even further. “It’s not how long you’ve been researching; it’s what you’re capable of that counts. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“What I mean is that there are countless others more knowledgeable than you on hematology.”

“Good. I’ll go ask them for tips. If it’s knowledge alone that distinguishes a man, maybe we ought to save this chair for a dictionary.”

“Stigma research is a vampire issue. We don’t need input from a goddamn human.”

“It’s human blood we’re trying to replicate, isn’t it? Can you really say we’re unimportant?”

Spallanzani had no reply. He gritted his teeth so hard it seemed his fangs might snap.

The Director rose to his feet and spoke softly. “The purpose of this lab is to improve and, most importantly, to develop a method of mass production for Stigma. This is a goal you vampires have pursued for hundreds of years, and still haven’t achieved. That’s the reason your Queen brought me here. I will do what I can here, and I expect you all to follow my lead, as long as I am Director.”

With that, the Director gave a dismissive wave and shifted his attention to the book lying on his desk. There was nothing Spallanzani could do but silently take his leave.

Unbelievably, no matter who Spallanzani asked, he could not get a single bad word about the Director. Even the (seemingly) most obvious person with whom to raise an objection, Associate Director Ionesco, shrugged it off. "As it is plain to see, I'm not good for much besides research. Frankly, I'm grateful he keeps this place running so smoothly," he said, flashing a smile.

Feeling as though he'd been betrayed by the entire world, Spallanzani could no longer focus on his studies. After a few days of this, Cunningham finally spoke up. "Doesn't seem like you've made much progress lately. Something troubling you?"

"No. It's just..." Spallanzani rubbed his ungroomed cheek. "To be frank, no amount of progress feels like progress, knowing it will go to a human's credit."

"You *are* frank," Cunningham grinned. "Well, you'll never achieve much with that attitude. Take a rest. You know, Professor Rushd should be back now. Perhaps you ought to have a talk with him."

"With Rushd?"

"Mm-hm. He probably shares your views more than anyone else here."

Professor Rushd's lab was the furthest room down the physiology block. A foreign scent attacked Spallanzani's nostrils the moment he entered.

"Ah, so you feel the same way. It's all very troubling,

isn't it?" Rushd wrinkled his already wrinkle-heavy face and served Spallanzani some Arabian tea. It had no taste, but a sweet aroma filled the air. "Queen's orders or not, it's hard to fathom that nobody has tossed that Director out by now," he griped as he poured a cup.

Feeling as though he'd finally gained an ally, Spallanzani nodded enthusiastically.

"How much can a human possibly learn, when he can't even live to a hundred?" Rushd said. "The required reading list for anyone who wants to work on Stigma is forty-six books long. He hasn't read half that number." He slapped the tower of books beside his desk, filling the entire room with dust. "I tell you, there's too much meaningless reliance on technology these days. Used to be Stigma was a product of the wisdom and experience of a chosen few. The sages of yesteryear knew well the dangers of carelessly introducing new factors. It wrecks the balance. We'd already mastered playing God 500 years ago. And now you can't get people to stop talking about 'DNA.' Utter nonsense."

"Huh."

"The silk used for filtering goat's blood must be Japanese, and you must use exactly seven sheets, stacked. Not Chinese, and not six or eight. There are good reasons for all of these things. You may think you've come up with something new, but if you look hard enough, you'll find that somewhere, someone has already written about it.

That's how deep our history runs. We should be closely reviewing what's already been done, not looking for some quick fix to suddenly show itself now."

"Huh. But it's not as though human science is inherently worthless. I mean..." Spallanzani said.

"What's that? Whose side are you on?" Rushd flashed him a glare, so Spallanzani saved his breath. "Just what is Her Majesty thinking? That's what I want to know," Rushd said, taking a deep puff from his hookah and letting out a long sigh.

Spallanzani continued listening as Rushd's gripes, theories, and random tangents dragged on. Gradually, Spallanzani's rage began to cool.

At the same time, he became aware of something. While Professor Rushd was certainly a great scholar, his mentality was hopelessly old-fashioned. It was telling that despite his significant seniority and superior bloodline, the position of department head had instead been given to Cunningham. Spallanzani also had to acknowledge that it was the Director who was responsible for creating a research environment where such an assignment was possible.

Drinking his flavorless Arabian tea, Spallanzani heard out Rushd's gripes to the very end, before returning to his own quarters.

After that, Spallanzani was once again able to devote

himself fully to his research. While he still hadn't truly accepted the Director, new developments in the pursuit of Stigma mass production had sent a wave of excitement throughout the facility. Though it greatly troubled Spallanzani to think that the sudden leap in progress was the result of the Director's appointment, he was now far too busy to dwell on it. It was all on him to get his own work done.

"Which do you think shows more promise? The Lorentia or the Dracaena?"

"The Lorentia, surely. Ultimately, it comes down to a difference in fertility."

"Pfft. And quality."

This sort of discussion had become a commonly overheard thing in the hallways and lounges of the facility. Due to the precise and unstable composition of Stigma, vampires had quickly abandoned the idea of producing it on a mass level using machinery. Instead, they focused on developing methods of biosynthesis via living organisms. By the time humans were first beginning to dabble in genetic engineering, vampire society had already been employing it for ages. Using this technology, they set out to create a sort of "bleeding plant."

Having tried out nearly every organism imaginable—plant, animal, even microbe—they had finally narrowed the ideal material down to two candidates: *Dracaena Crudelis*,

a species of agave plant; and *Lorentia Sanguinalis*, a type of red algae.

On the one hand, they had succeeded in filling the succulent leaves of a *Dracaena* with a nutrient fluid quite similar to modern-day *Stigma*. Experiments with the red algae, meanwhile, suggested they might be able to develop a process wherein they could collect massive amounts of a *Stigma*-like substance from the seawater surrounding the plant. Their work now boiled down to a decision between two options: improving the fertility and composition of the *Dracaena*, or pursuing the high output productivity of the *Lorentia*.

Each and every researcher at Bergamasque had his own thoughts on which option was the better, and the debate waged on daily. The Director himself was leaning more in favor of the *Dracaena*, while the Associate Director was a passionate proponent of the *Lorentia*, making the question a polarizing issue that threatened to split the entire facility in two. Spallanzani, for his part, continued to focus predominantly on the improvement of *Stigma*'s flavor, and thus asserted his support for the *Dracaena* plan, despite his reluctance to follow the human Director's lead.

Then one day, it happened. As evening fell and all began to awaken from sleep, somebody noticed that the Associate Director was nowhere to be found. Everyone searched the facility, eventually coming to the cold storage

room where they discovered Associate Director Ionesco's clothes and a pile of ashes lying in a puddle of blood.

A roll call confirmed that the Associate Director was the only missing staff member. In a vampire's case, very little could be learned from an autopsy, but one thing seemed fairly certain. "At the very least, I think it's safe to say those ashes are the Associate Director," Cunningham said with a grave expression.

The research facility was placed under emergency lockdown, and all departments were ordered to stand by. Count Ionesco had been a direct retainer to House Tepes since its Transylvania days. Thus, the death of the Associate Director didn't just mean a loss for the facility—it had political implications as well.

Of more immediate concern to the facility, however, was the large amount of blood spilled at the scene of his death. Human blood was required for the nourishment of the Lorentia plants they were breeding, and for this purpose, a supply was being held in the cold storage room. That blood was now smeared all over the floor. Their remaining stock wouldn't be enough to preserve the breeding environment for another full day. Unable to simply "stand by" in such a grave situation, the key members of the Physiology Department gathered for an emergency meeting.

"We must get to the bottom of this quickly and end this

lockdown. Otherwise our Lorentia is a lost cause.”

Cunningham’s statement was met with silence. Getting to the bottom of it meant identifying the murderer. Out of the entire facility, nobody was of a higher-class bloodline than Associate Director Ionesco. That meant there was no vampire there capable of killing him. And only one person there wasn’t a vampire.

“Where is the Director?” Dufresne said, with an undercurrent of panic in his voice.

“Hey, what are you getting at?” another researcher said, rising to his feet.

“I only asked where he is.”

“Calm down now, all of you. The Director has been in Research Lab Seven since this evening. He’s operating in an airtight quarantine, so nobody’s allowed to enter.”

“At a time like this, nobody’s allowed to enter?! Does he seriously think it’s okay to lock himself away right now? Why, he’s been acting odd since yesterday. Even you thought so, sir. Am I wrong?”

Cunningham grimaced and said nothing. Yesterday was Friday, and Cunningham had held his usual film screening. The Director had been in attendance, but had suddenly stood and left the room in the middle of the movie. Everybody thought it was strange.

“I’m not so sure about that,” Spallanzani said, speaking up for the first time. “Supposing the Director had been plotting something, it seems to me he would make a

conscious effort *not* to arouse suspicion.”

“So you think that proves him innocent?” Dufresne scoffed.

“I’m not saying that. I just think we should avoid speculating.”

“Oh, so you think I’m speculating?”

“I’m just saying we need to approach this with care. This is a very serious matter.”

“Spallanzani, I heard you were a critic of the Director’s. So when’d you change loyalties?” Dufresne’s voice was growing more and more agitated. “You were a Dracaena supporter, weren’t you? No wonder you’re so blasted eager to defend him.”

“Don’t push me!”

“I believe I asked you to calm down,” Cunningham said with deliberate sternness. “Now, I don’t believe there is a single person here of such feeble intellect that he would let his own personal emotions hinder academic pursuit. Spallanzani, join me for a moment.”

Spallanzani walked with Cunningham into the empty hallway. Cunningham paced back and forth for a moment before facing him again.

“I’ll just ask you straight. Do you think the Director did it?”

“Well, I don’t know.” Spallanzani answered truthfully. “But by my assessment, I don’t think that he would kill someone ranked below him over a scholarly disagreement.

And I certainly don't think someone like the Director would do something so rash, knowing suspicion would almost assuredly point to him."

"I agree," Cunningham grinned. "As you know, I'm of the opinion that the Lorentia holds more promise. We may favor different methods, but we're in agreement in that we both seek the truth. Wouldn't you agree?"

Spallanzani also grinned and gave a nod. "My God. There's certainly no shortage of intellectual stimulation around here."

Bergamasque was in an uproar. Strict orders were issued for all departments to stay on lockdown, and the military police had even been dispatched. But even that wasn't enough to keep a lid on things. Other departments were holding similar emergency meetings, and even those left out of the meetings could be found gossiping about the incident.

This made it easy enough to get a read on things, but a surprising number of the researchers suspected the Director. It seemed there were many who harbored unspoken disdain towards him for being a human. Some had gathered outside Research Lab Seven and were banging on the door.

"Director, please come out. This is an emergency situation."

"I'm sorry, but my work can't be stopped midway. I'll

leave the murder mystery in your capable hands,” he said curtly through the intercom.

“Damn him! What does he expect *us* to do about it?!” A researcher kicked the door in aggravation.

“I beg your pardon,” Spallanzani asked him. “Do you know what’s inside that lab?”

“Some medical equipment, germs, viruses. It’s designed so that you can’t open it from the outside when someone’s working inside.”

“Well obviously, that’s why he’s locked himself in there. Goddammit,” someone grumbled.

Cunningham stood before the intercom. “Director. Why did you leave in the middle of film club yesterday?”

“Personal reasons. There’s no need to talk about it.”

“Personal reasons?!”

Cunningham and Spallanzani managed to calm the researchers before they could tear down the airlocked door, reminding them not to do anything rash. The two then made their way back to the scene of the murder—the cold storage room.

“This is bad. We’re in worse shape than I thought.”

Spallanzani nodded in agreement. “I do wonder what the Director is thinking. There’s only so much we can do if he’s going to invite suspicion like that.”

More people had gathered outside the cold storage room. Spallanzani and Cunningham pushed their way

through the crowd and entered the room. The floor was covered with a sticky pool of blood. In the middle lay a pile of ashes and some crumpled clothes, all reddish-black and clotted with the blood they had absorbed. There were also a number of footprints leading to the entrance, probably from when the clothes and ashes were first examined.

Spallanzani poked the pool of blood with the tip of a fountain pen. It hadn't hardened very much, but blood coagulation takes longer in lower temperatures, so it still had to be assumed that a fair amount of time had passed.

"It was roughly 2 PM. So about four hours have passed since his death," a nearby researcher said, intuiting Spallanzani's thoughts. "That's assuming he died at the same time the blood was spilled, of course."

"That's the middle of the night for us. But not for humans," another researcher said, with a cynical tone.

"Hey, don't talk like that."

The atmosphere was turning unfriendly, so Spallanzani and Cunningham hurried to take their leave.

Afterward, they made a round of inquiries to several departments, but people everywhere were walking on pins and needles, and offered nothing by way of clues pertaining to the murder. The Pathology Department, which had been overseen by the Associate Director himself, was worst of all.

“The Associate Director was a homosexual.”

“Yesterday afternoon, I saw the shadow of an enormous monkey in the hall.”

The gossip was out of control.

“Yeah, sure, a monkey. What is this, Edgar Allan Poe?”

“Well, the part about the sodomy is true, anyway. I heard it from the man himself!”

“Who gives a damn about that?!”

The only significant discovery was that, according to the gate record, it would have been possible for an intruder to enter the premises the previous night. But even after mobilizing all available staff to thoroughly search the premises, no intruder was to be found.

By the time dawn began its approach, they still hadn’t learned anything new.

“More and more people are gathering by that lab. We may have the makings of a riot on our hands,” Cunningham said, stroking his mustache. In just half a day, he’d developed bags under his eyes.

Spallanzani dragged his own lethargic body to rest against the wall of the lounge as he sipped on a pack of Stigma. He’d certainly never thought Stigma tasted good, but tonight it seemed to be launching an outright assault on his tongue.

“Should we do another search around the facility?” Spallanzani suggested. “Perhaps the intruder transformed

into something unusual and is hiding in our midst...”

“With all the searching we done, I doubt we’ll find anything new. In any case, we’ll never obtain more of that blood. The Lorentia’s a lost cause now.” Cunningham’s shoulders drooped.

Desperate, Spallanzani wracked his brain. He replayed all the day’s events in his head. His conversation with the Director outside the lab door. The pile of ashes in the storage room. The big, blood-soaked pile of ashes, sitting in a blackish pool of drying blood. The wet, blood-soaked pile of clothes beside the ashes.

“...?” Something was fishy about all this. There was something strange hidden in these images. “Sir, let’s imagine I was stabbed, like this, and died. What would happen to me in that event?”

Cunningham glanced up quizzically. “Well, you’d turn to ash, I should think.”

“And after turning to ash, what would become of my clothes?”

“They’d just fall where they are.” Cunningham pointed at the floor beneath Spallanzani’s feet.

“That’s right. They’d fall on top of the ashes, wouldn’t they?” Spallanzani tossed his pack of Stigma. “So why, then, were the Associate Director’s clothes lying *next to* his ashes?”

Cunningham’s expression froze. “...What does this mean?”

“I don’t know yet.”

Cunningham rose to his feet. Without another word, the two of them ran back to the storage room.

The room was as cold as ever, but the blood was drier than before and made a crackling sound underfoot. Just as they had first found it, a mound of ashes and the Associate Director’s crumpled clothes lay in the middle of the room. But upon closer inspection, the mound of ashes was elongated, with half of it covered by the clothes.

Spallanzani slipped on some gloves and pulled on a sticky black thread, lifting the sleeves of a lab coat and sweater, revealing more ashes underneath.

“What is that?”

“This here is probably the Associate Director.” Spallanzani released the thread and pointed to the mound of ashes extending out past the clothing. “And I guess that over there is probably our intruder.”

“So this is from two different people. It’s all soaked in blood, so I miscalculated the amount,” Cunningham muttered. “So then who was this intruder?”

“That I don’t know. But there’s only one set of clothes here.” Spallanzani rose to his feet and surveyed the room. “Which means the second person was naked.”

Cunningham looked up. “The Associate Director was a homosexual, wasn’t he?”

“That’s the rumor. I sure don’t understand it.”

“Not my cup of tea either. But I know a few people like that.” Cunningham rose now as well and walked toward the door with wide strides. “One can’t kill someone of a higher bloodline. That much is well known, but there are exceptions. There are cases of lovers’ suicide where it’s been known to occur.”

This time, it was Spallanzani’s expression that froze. The two of them exited the room, exchanged a nod, and took off in opposite directions.

“Our digging around paid off. It was Professor Rushd,” Cunningham said breathlessly after they rendezvoused some time later. “I checked with several of our vets. It seems pretty certain that he was our Associate Director’s lover.”

“Bingo.” Spallanzani showed him the travel bag he now carried under his arm. “I was searching all of the empty quarters, and I found this in Rushd’s room. Where is he supposed to be right now?”

“Alexandria, overseeing an herb trade. It’s a secret transaction, so it wouldn’t be unusual not to hear from him for a few days.”

“It’d be quite difficult to go there and confirm he’s not actually there.”

“We can worry about that later. For now, we need to let everyone know,” Cunningham said, and dashed off. Spallanzani followed close behind.

The incensed researchers were moments from tearing down the lab door when the two arrived. Convincing them was no easy task, but with the physical evidence of Rushd's travel bag, somehow they managed. The crowd eventually began to disperse and Cunningham slumped his shoulders. "Even if we ran to Novate Mezzola now, it would take another day to procure more blood. We managed to put out the immediate fire, but we're still too late."

As Spallazani searched for some words of comfort, the door to the research lab opened with a hiss of pressurized air escaping.

"Phew. Out of the storm at last."

"Director!" Spallanzani and Cunningham cried in unison.

"What on earth have you been doing all this time? You caused a whole lot of trouble out here," Cunningham said.

"I know. I could hear it. But right now, I think this is more important." The Director pulled open the cooler bag he was holding, revealing a large number of plastic bags filled with a beautifully familiar deep red liquid.

"Blood!" Cunningham cried in astonishment. "Where was this?"

"Technically inside my body, if you must know," the Director answered, not twitching an eyebrow. "It's already been filtered for use as nutrient fluid. Go ahead and use it."

Cunningham accepted the bag with quivering hands. "This is more blood than a single human can supply. How did you do it?"

"I helped myself to our supply of Stigma. If you keep drinking that stuff while the blood's being taken, and make sure to rest frequently, it can be done in about half a day."

As a matter of fact, the Director's normal healthy glow had indeed gone pale, and his legs were shaking. Clutching the bag to his chest, Cunningham thanked him profusely and dashed down the hallway. Spallanzani, in utter shock, followed him with his gaze before returning to the Director.

"So that's why you shut yourself up in the lab to begin with?"

"Well, that and maybe to get away from all you people. I knew I would end up being the prime suspect."

"Don't tell me you knew the truth all this time."

"Of course not. I just wrapped my brain around it a minute ago while talking to you." He frowned. "I didn't even realize there were any gay folks around here."

"You mean to tell me," Spallanzani said, finally putting all the pieces together, "that you were in there all this time, extracting your own blood, without any idea of what was going on and falling under false suspicions that could have cost you your life? All for the sake of the Lorentia?"

"Well, the only certainty was that we didn't have enough

blood to last out this lockdown. I had no choice but to leave the rest to you gentlemen.”

“But what if we never figured out the truth, and you’d been hanged as a murderer?”

The Director pushed up his glasses with the tip of his finger and looked Spallanzani dead in the eye.

“We have the greatest minds in vampirekind collected in this research center, Spallanzani. If not a single one of you had managed to see the truth in time to save me, I would’ve laughed and mocked the lot of you from Hell.”

Spallanzani sensed an abyssal darkness within the Director’s eyes and became unable to speak. The Director looked over his petrified colleague and the corners of his mouth curled into a grin.

“You were right, by the way. That stuff tastes awful. I sympathize with anyone who has to live off that crap.”

With that, the Director shakily returned to his office as the still motionless Spallanzani watched on.

After a few days, the military police finally arrived and confirmed that Spallanzani’s deductions were almost completely accurate. They had discovered that Professor Rushd had left from Alexandria a day earlier than scheduled, and entered Milano half a day before the murder.

“Rushd’s relationship with the Associate Director had grown rocky over the past few years. It may be that his

early return and then the spilling of all that Lorentia blood was the result of their romantic drama. Incidentally, his transformed state is said to be that of a giant ape. Perhaps the Associate Director liked it rough,” Cunningham added with a peculiar expression.

Several weeks after that, Queen Mina herself arrived to inspect the premises. She expressed her distress over the incident, and thanked the entire staff for their efforts. The staff filled her in on the Dracaena and Lorentia options, and after a bit of contemplation, she ordered them to concentrate their efforts on the Lorentia.

Her reasoning: “The prospect of using seawater for mass production will prove convenient.” It would be more than thirty years before Spallanzani understood the meaning of those words.

There were still several unresolved issues. One was that some research materials from Associate Director Ionesco’s office had been lost. It was thought that Professor Rushd had probably hidden them, but no matter how thoroughly they searched the facility, the materials were nowhere to be found.

“There’s one more thing I don’t get,” Spallanzani said early one morning, catching the Director on his way for a stroll. “The night before the incident, why did you leave in the middle of the film? And why wouldn’t you tell us the reason before?”

“What’s the point in asking about that now?” the Director said coolly.

“For the sake of my intellectual curiosity. What’s a scholar’s purpose, if not that?”

The Director remained silent for a long while before replying. “Do you remember the movie we watched that night?”

“Ohhh, *Black Sunday*, or something to that effect, right? About an Israeli assassin fighting terrorists in a football stadium. If that kind of blood and guts is what humans are into these days, it must be the end of the world.”

“You said it. The end of the world,” the Director said with a hint of disgust. “A movie with an Israeli hero, of all things. It’s nauseating. There’s your reason.”

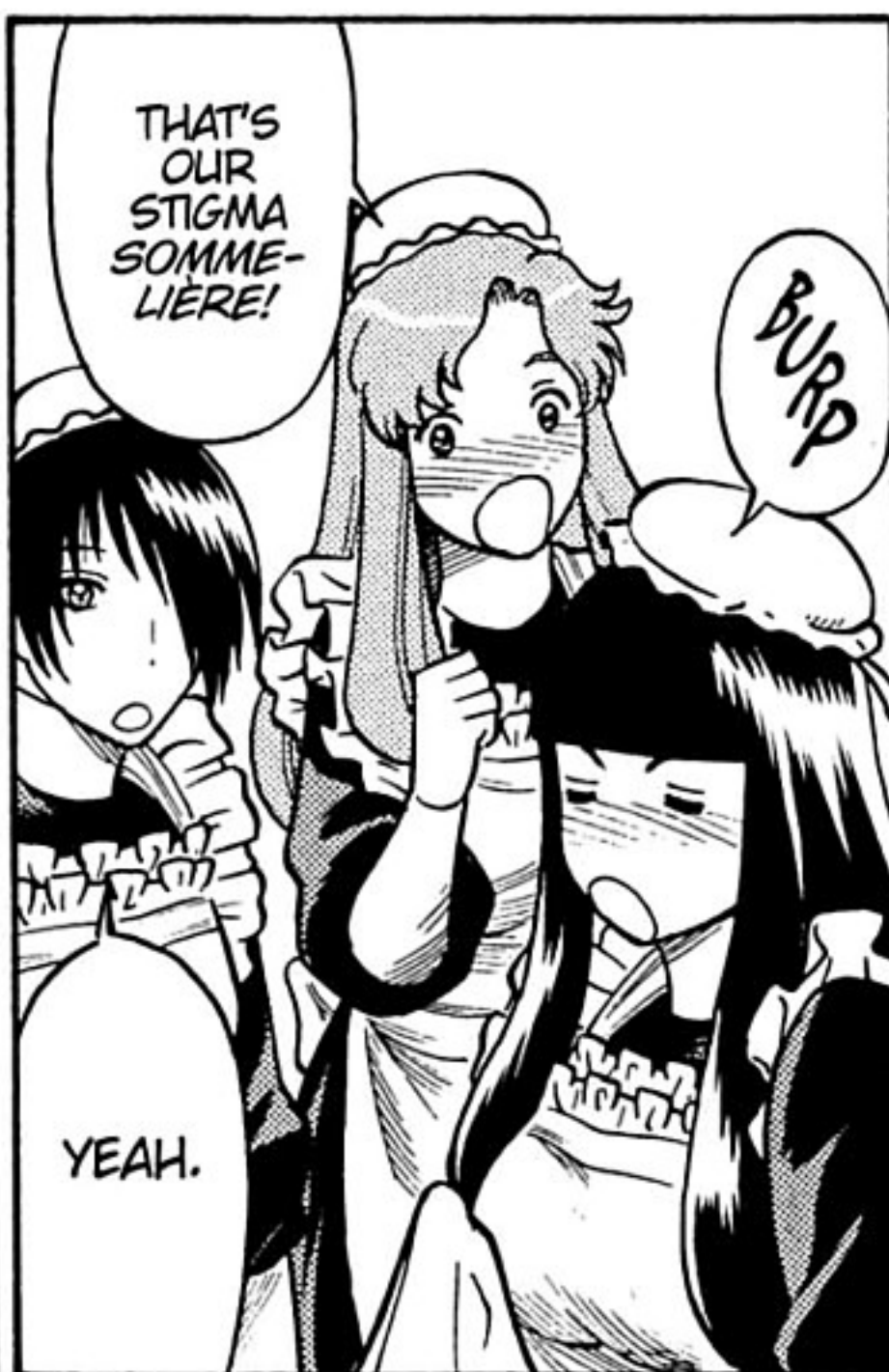
“Huh?” As Spallanzani stood agape, the Director briskly made his way to the entrance. The morning light was already starting to peek through the door, preventing Spallanzani from pursuing. As he stood there awkwardly, the Director turned back to him once more, and his lips curled again into a devilish grin.

“Humans have their own stigma, you know. I’ll let you do the rest of the math, Spallanzani.”



Y'KNOW ...

YOU GIRLS HAVE BEEN GOIN' ON AND ON ABOUT GOOD STIGMA THIS, BAD STIGMA THAT...



THAT'S OUR STIGMA SOMME-LIERE!

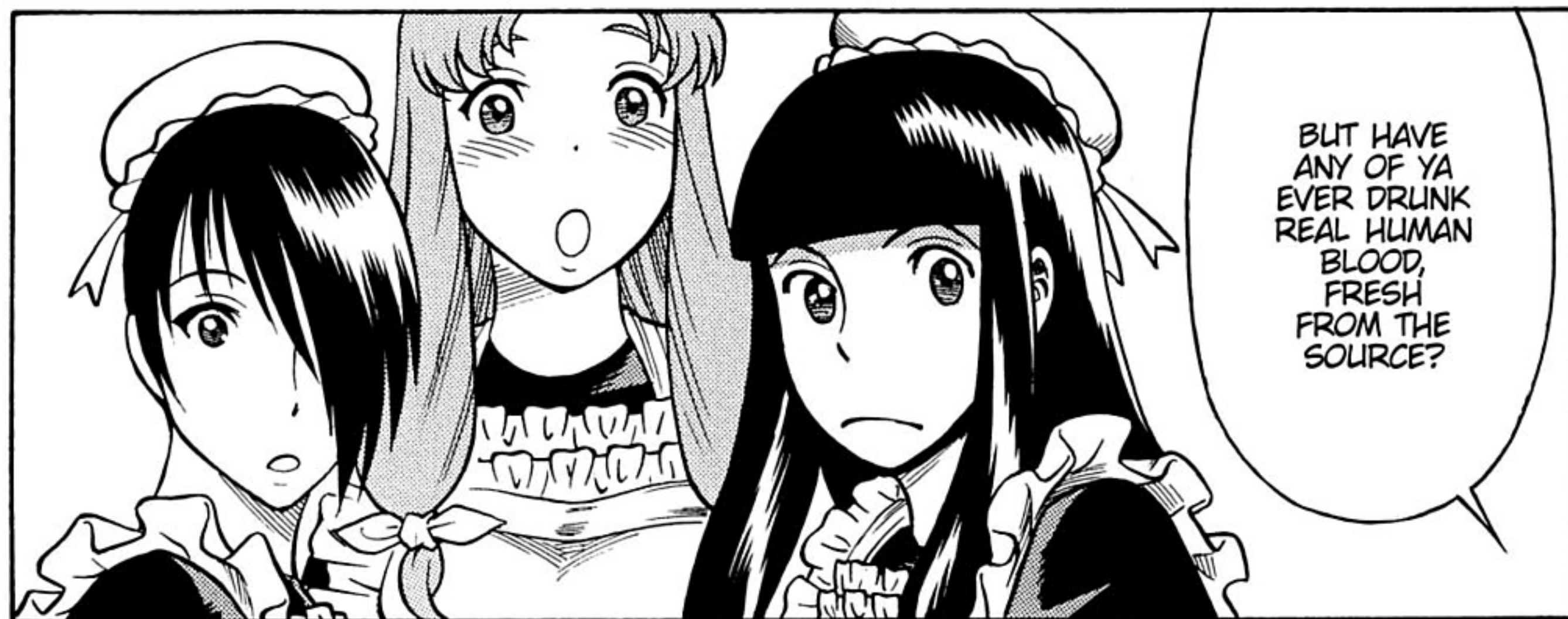
BURP

YEAH.



OH MY...

THIS NEW BATCH OF STIGMA IS SMOOTHER THAN THE OLD ONES. MUCH FULLER.



BUT HAVE ANY OF YA EVER DRUNK REAL HUMAN BLOOD, FRESH FROM THE SOURCE?



NOT ME!

BACK BEFORE I STARTED WORKING FOR THE ROYAL FAMILY, I MADE DUE WITH ANIMAL BLOOD A LOT.

AND WHEN I FOUGHT IN THE WAR NOT LONG AGO, I JUST BIT DOWN. I NEVER REALLY DRANK...



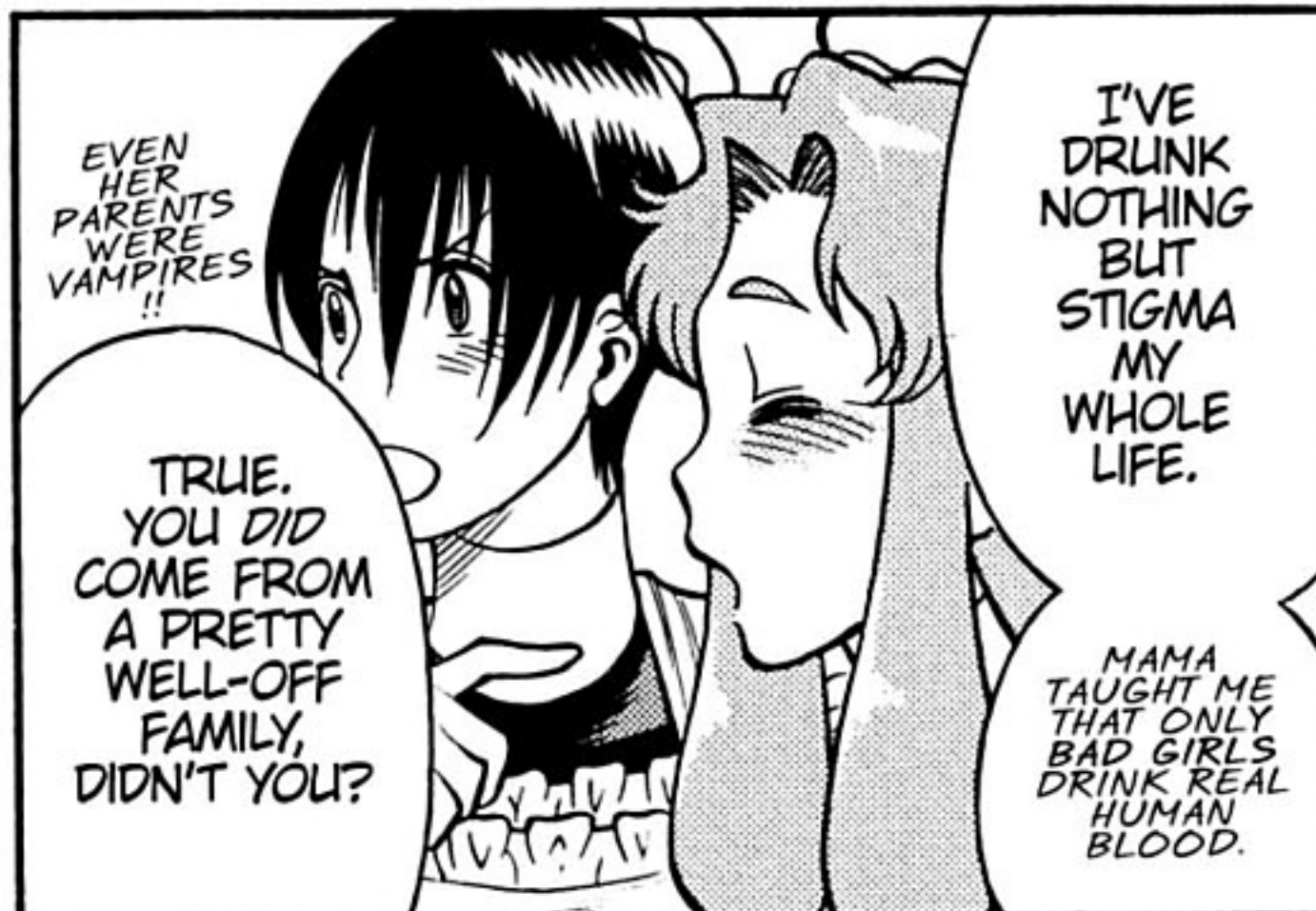
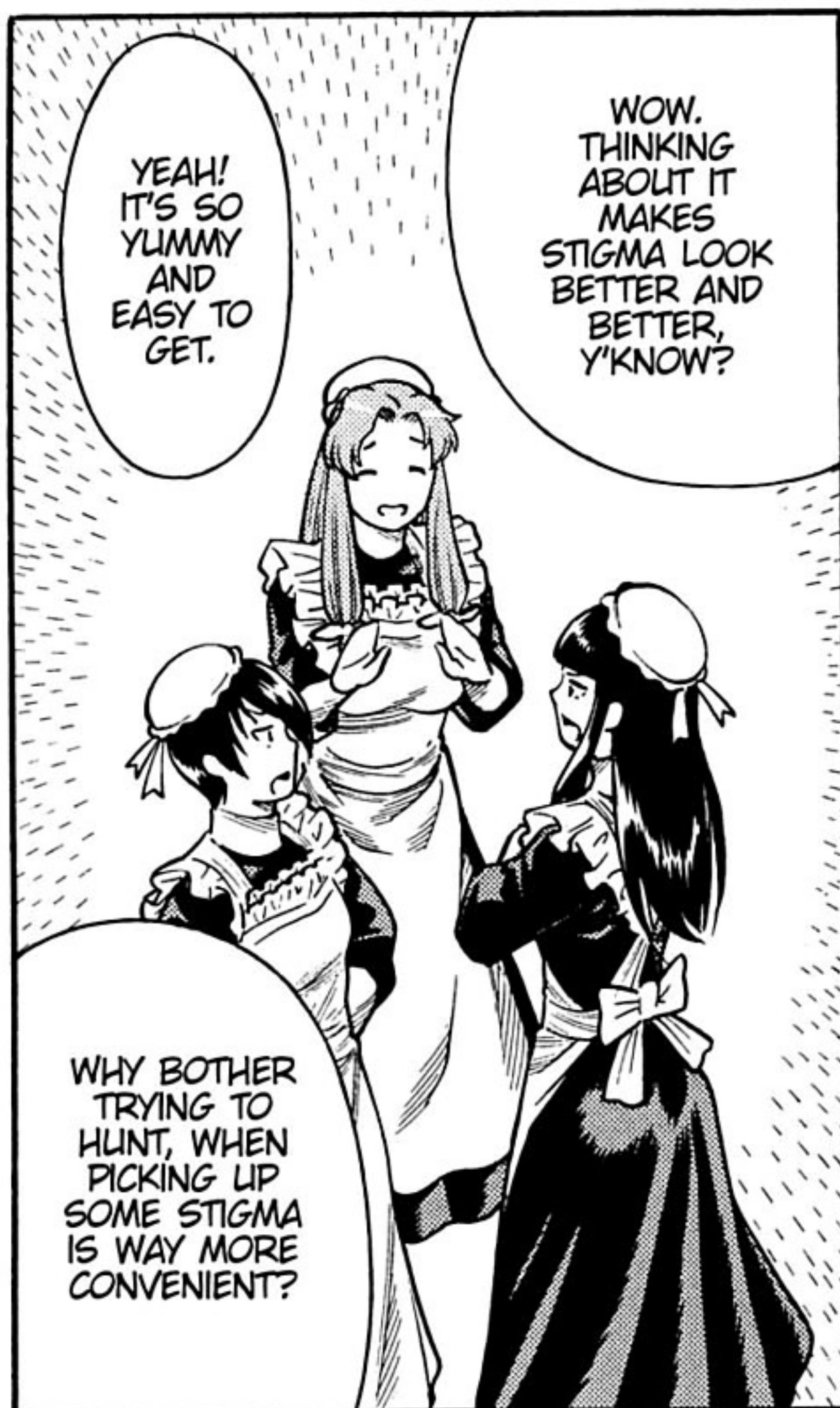
HUH?

WAIT... I MIGHT NOT HAVE...



UM...

WELL YEAH, WAY BACK WHEN I...



PART 3

—Connie 1—

It was another clear day in the Vampire Bund. The sun beat down on gleaming asphalt, at times catching glass and reflecting its ultraviolet rays deep into the shade. Trees lining the roads swayed gently in the breeze, their green-laden branches casting wavery shadows on the pavement below. It was the perfect weather for a day outdoors.

Nevertheless, the Bund's above-ground downtown district was completely deserted. To the vampires, who spent their days holed up in the underground residential zone, the weather was of no interest.

Of course, all things have their exceptions. In a plaza

in front of a nearby elevator station, a few dozen vampires stood gathered together, each adorned in full-body protective gear. Since they were indistinguishable from one another, each had a unique number scrawled large on both the chest and back.

They were “Cleaners”—responsible for tidying up the town after it had been thoroughly sullied by vampires the previous night. The Cleaners began their job with the sunrise and worked all the way into the evening, dispersing to their assigned zones and cleaning them thoroughly, both indoors and out.

A simple enough task, but any accidental rupturing of their protective gear would mean instant death. The downtown squad in particular, responsible for the disposal of leftover Stigma that had been scattered by blimp, faced severe working conditions, and were thus selected only from the most fit and courageous of the two hundred or so crew.

This particular squad had been tasked with one additional duty today.

Having finished up their cleaning work, they rested as a large bus pulled up in front of them.

“Here they come.”

Connie, who had been lying on a bench, slowly rose to her feet at her partner’s call. She wore a large number 5 on the left side of her chest.

The bus doors opened and a few dozen passengers,

young and old, male and female alike, got off. They all wore different clothes, but none of them had the same protective gear as the Cleaners. This made perfect sense; all of these passengers were human.

“Time to earn that milk money,” Connie’s partner said, as he stood up and smoothed the wrinkles out of his gear.

This was their special job: to greet and interact with tourists visiting the Bund. Since the streets were too dangerous to walk at night with all the vampires out, tours were restricted to daytime hours. Naturally, there were no vampires above ground in the afternoon, but since prior tourists had complained that tours of the deserted Bund were utterly boring, the Cleaners now doubled as guides.

Until recently, Connie had despised this duty. She would ignore humans who approached her asking for a souvenir photograph. She had a reputation on the Internet: “Cleaner #5 is real distant.” It was after her first “hunt” that all of this changed.

Both her current partner and her previous partner, Kincaid, had earned popularity amongst regular visitors by being outgoing and charming. To continue hunting, they had to avoid standing out. Paradoxically, one could do a better job of staying invisible in this line of work by making themselves more visible.

This wasn’t all for the sake of the hunt. Connie held yet another side job, which also required her to remain inconspicuous.

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND

A group of tourists requested her service, and she led them into a gift shop facing the plaza. The gift shop primarily served these tourists, and thus operated only during the day. The shop's show window was, of course, made of anti-UV glass, and the shop was run by the Fangless, who politely greeted customers within. It sold everything from vampire novelty goods—rubber fangs, Count Dracula capes, Stigma ration containers filled with strawberry jam—to rare souvenirs sold only in the Bund, like night scenery photo books.

But by far, the most popular item in the store was a photograph of Queen Mina. The queen's elegant beauty had contributed greatly to removing the Bund's negative "stigma" amongst humans.

Once inside, the Cleaners removed their protective face shields so they could pose for souvenir photographs with the guests. In reality, it was strictly forbidden for the Cleaners to reveal their faces to humans, lest they be overcome by bloodlust, but the tips they received for this sort of "special service" were enticing enough to justify the risk.

The tourists gasped as Connie removed her face shield. She was the lone female amongst the Cleaners, and her exotic Indian beauty always attracted the eyes of visitors. Though she didn't offer a smile, she dutifully answered the requests of the tourists flocking around her.

An oddly loud bellow rang throughout the store.

Connie glanced toward the register to see her squad leader picking on one of the Fangless store clerks. He was wearing one of the Dracula capes and striking dramatic vampire poses as he badgered the clerk to show his missing fangs. This happened all the time. Rumor had it that the squad leader was the clerk's master. It was hardly surprising that he was so negligent of the safety rules.

The Fangless looked down and said nothing. If he followed the usual pattern, he would ultimately end up doing as the squad leader commanded, showing off his teeth to the guests as a special treat.

It was unpleasant and doubtlessly humiliating, but Connie wasn't willing to put herself out on the Fangless's behalf. She placed her hand on the shoulder of the tourist standing beside her and turned him back towards the digital camera pointed at them.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw the Fangless make a quick movement. He grabbed a wine bottle from the counter and bashed the squad leader in the side of the head with it. The thick bottle glass burst into shards like a movie prop, splattering red wine onto the female tourist standing next to the squad leader.

The Fangless grabbed the dizzied squad leader by the head and sunk his talon-like fingers into each eye socket. Blood and a translucent jelly-like substance oozed from the squad leader's eyes.

The Fangless removed his fingers and went immediately

for the squad leader's protective gear, which he tore open at the chest. He peeled the gear around the squad leader's chest, binding his arms.

The squad leader was unable to react to any of this. Fangless or not, his assailant had managed to disable both his eyes and arms without warning. There was nothing he could do. As he struggled and squirmed, the Fangless took him and lifted him easily over his own head, eyes blood-red with rage.

Before any of the onlookers could make a move to stop him, the Fangless hurled the squad leader toward the storefront window. His body flew across the store, nearly hitting the ceiling, and collided with the glass. He burst through it with a terrible crash, landing hard on the asphalt outside. The window was completely destroyed, leaving shards of glass scattered for several meters in all directions.

The squad leader's exposed upper body, now bathed in sunlight, instantly erupted into flames. He writhed in agony and let out a shrill scream.

As though the scream had broken some sort of spell, commotion broke out. Some of the tourists inside the gift shop screamed, while others poured out the exit. Other tourists outside panicked and fled at the sight of the blazing squad leader. The Cleaners and the clerks still inside the store rushed the Fangless, pushed him to the floor, and dogpiled him.

NO DIFFERENT FLESH

Connie moved deeper into the store to avoid the sunlight now leaking in. Normally the idea of a Fangless resorting to violence was unthinkable, much less violence directed at one's own master.

Despite Connie's shock at the chaos before her, she also felt a strange sort of awakening.

The shattered window glass. The vampire tumbling and writhing under the sun. A body overcome with flames. All of it felt familiar, as though she had seen it all before, and recently too. Could it be...?

Connie looked around the store, and quickly found what she was looking for. Or rather, who.

On top of the counter, square between the cash register and revolving keyrack, was Ravi. The first time she had reunited with her deceased lover since coming to the Bund was just after seeing Kincaid plummet from a building and burst into flames. So perhaps it was lucky that she'd now witnessed a nearly identical scene, putting her in a similar emotional state.

The Cleaners had the Fangless pinned on the floor just behind the counter, but Ravi remained still, eyes lowered and expression unreadable, apparently unaware of the ensuing madness. His body was missing from the waist down. Ravi's internal organs drooped just above the Cleaners' heads, but none of them seemed to notice.

This meant that Connie would be able to see Ravi a few more times. And when he lifted his face, she would have

her verdict. If his eyes were the rotted eyes of a corpse, she would have to perform a hunt to send him back to the spirit world.

She already knew who her prey would be: the Librarian—the man who found her these side jobs. When she'd learned that he had contributed to the annihilation of her home, the Mughal Empire, it felt truly serendipitous. Until now, each hunt had been a matter of necessity, but just this once, it would be something more.

Her next hunt would be something to look forward to.

Connie shut herself off to the surrounding chaos and watched the top of Ravi's head intently.

—Mack 1—

Around midnight, the lights that could be seen around the Bund from the coast grew dim. This was done as a gesture to appeal to the humans living on the mainland: “We rest at night just like you. Sleep tight and don't mind us.”

Of course, this was a far cry from the reality. The night was the Bund residents' time to come alive, and it mattered little whether there was any light or not. Indeed, a night enveloped in darkness was all the more cozy to them. Nights in the downtown Bund were much like what one would see in a human city's red light district, the

darkness punctured by neon glare, but here they played out in utter darkness.

It was here, downtown, that a single child walked alone. He wore a New York Yankees cap that covered his eyes, denim pants, and a stadium jumper. He looked like something straight out of a kid's clothing ad, but a vampire's apparent age can be deceiving. Though he received the occasional curious glance, no one here scolded him for being out past his bedtime.

Then again, preconceptions can be hard to ignore.

"Hey, Mack!" came a voice from behind him. He stopped, took a breath, and glanced over his shoulder. A thick, bare, hairy leg thrust itself into his face.

"You just bumped into my leg, didn't you? Look how dirty it is." A bald-headed man with unfocused, darting eyes stood there with an unseemly grin. From his face, it was clear that he was drunk off of blood. It was still too early for the Stigma airdrop, so he must have been off somewhere binging on the real stuff.

The kid gave no answer, so the man swung his leg, trying to kick him. In the same instant, he found himself flipped upside-down, and landed face-first in a gutter puddle.

"Show a little respect when you call someone by his name," the kid said coldly, and once again began walking, as if nothing had happened.

His name was, in fact, Mack. Or rather, that was what everybody called him. Only a rare few knew his true

name; at times, even he couldn't remember what it was.

Mack was in a foul mood. It was highly unusual for him to be in a good mood per se, but tonight's mood was vile even for him. He got this way whenever he was subjected to some pointless task by his master, for whom he held little love. The three things he hated in this world were complications, trouble, and bratty kids, but for some reason, he seemed to be constantly pursued by all three.

He tugged down the brim of his cap and wove through crowds of people, finally coming to an exceptionally large building.

"Medical Center"

The words were written in large letters on an awning over the entrance. Mack made his way through the foyer and straight to the reception desk. He lifted himself up to the counter and held out a business card.

"I'm here to see Chief-of-Staff Cunningham."

The woman sitting at the counter examined both sides of the card and picked up her telephone receiver. After exchanging a few words, she rose from her seat, wearing an expression of disbelief.

"I'm Cunningham. I was filled in by a Mr. Harvey."

The room to which Mack had been led was an elegant, stately space, somehow relaxing in spite of its grandeur, and it was clear at first glance that it was the room of a highly intellectual individual.

NO DIFFERENT FLESH

Indeed, the man before him now greeted Mack's brusque attitude with a magnanimous disposition and sharp gaze worthy of occupying such a space. He neither made light of nor patronized Mack for his childlike appearance, instead greeting him with unwavering eye contact. Mack's intuition told him that this was no ordinary individual. Then again, it would take someone extraordinary to oversee the medical center accountable for the lives of every single resident of the Bund.

"I'm Mack. I guess you've already heard, but I'm looking for someone. Do you know this guy?" He produced a cell phone from his breast pocket and pulled up a photograph onscreen. Cunningham took the phone, and his mouth formed into a nostalgic grin.

"Well, if it isn't Spallanzani."

"They say you know the guy. Got any info on him?"

"Yes, indeed we do go back a ways." Cunningham stroked his well-kept beard as he examined the photo thoroughly. "But I haven't seen him in about a year. Has something happened to him?"

"He was supposed to be researching something, but all contact cut off a week ago."

"Researching?"

"Don't ask me. He was doing it for someone else."

Cunningham was about to continue the conversation when a man in a white doctor's smock barged through the door.

“Sir! It’s the third case of a tooth extraction this week. Something strange is going on.”

“I’m with a visitor, Saji. Could we do this later?”

“I beg your pardon, sir.” The man called Saji gave Mack a nod. “But it’s happening almost every day now. We’ve had three patients this week alone who’ve had their teeth pulled out after disobeying their master. We can assume there have been countless more cases where they didn’t get off so easy.”

Cunningham began to speak, but then stopped himself. Perplexed, he glanced back and forth between Saji and Mack. Mack gestured his acquiescence, shrugged, and plopped himself down on the sofa in the corner of the room. Saji hesitated for a moment, bowed once again to Mack, then returned his attention to Cunningham.

“In any case, we need to investigate and devise a countermeasure at once,” Saji said. “Isn’t government administration going to do something about this?”

“It’s been reported to the government already. But master killings aren’t necessarily unheard of at the bottom of the hierarchy. They’ve ruled the recent string a mere coincidence.”

Mack played aloof, secretly engraving every word of the conversation into his memory. These off-the-cuff snippets of dialogue had a tendency to come in handy when one least expected it.

“That’s ridiculous!” Saji objected. “The increase

in incidents this past month alone is clearly out of the ordinary. I don't know if there's some kind of medical condition to blame or not, but even supposing it's just some sudden societal trend, we need to be absolutely—"

"That may be the case, but we don't have the clout we need to convince the government right now. I agree that this is out of the ordinary. If you think these incidents are all somehow related, find the evidence needed to change their minds. Go with him."

"Huh?"

"Huh?"

Suddenly brought into the conversation, Mack felt his jaw fall open. The man called Saji wore the same expression.

"That's Mack. He's a Bund investigator of sorts, and he's come in search of someone. Mack, allow me to introduce you to Doctor Saji here, our very skilled dental surgeon. I think you'll make good partners."

"Get serious."

Cunningham held a hand up to silence him. "Saji's in charge of tooth extractions, giving him a degree of influence amongst the Fangless. If you pursue that route, I think he'll prove quite handy. Don't think of it as a trade-off, but I'm asking you to help him with his investigation as well." He didn't seem to be waiting for an actual yes or no.

"Sir, what about my usual duties?"

"Like I said, I agree with you that we can't just let this

lie. Knowing you, I'm guessing you were planning to go after this during your off-duty hours?"

A lucky guess. Saji said nothing.

Cunningham took a single page of fine letterhead manuscript paper from his desk, quickly wrote something down, and handed it to Saji. "Here, now it's in writing. Think of it as a doctor's note. I want you to work with this man to find my friend."

Clearly, this was no ordinary individual. As Mack clutched his head in despair, a hand was thrust before him. He looked up to see the half-capitulating, half-bewildered smile of Saji.

"Saji Kazuo. I guess we'd better get to know each other."

"...Mack."

Here it was. Another complication. Mack sighed deeply and grabbed Saji's hand.

—Connie 2—

It was three days after the shocking Fangless attack before the Librarian appeared to Connie. After that incident, all Bund tours had been suspended. Connie had assumed this would mean no more side work for a while, so his appearance came as a surprise.

After finishing her usual Cleaner routine under the new squad leader, Connie entered an empty changing room

to remove her gear. The Librarian was leaning against a wall. He wore his usual ensemble—a bland jacket and turtleneck sweater—and gazed upon her with his hands clasped behind his back, his usual pose.

“I didn’t think there’d be any work until the tours started up again,” Connie said, her gaze steadily forward.

“None of the usual work, no,” the Librarian said with a shrug. “Today I have something different to ask of you. Something far more important.”

“Something I can handle during my break?”

Connie’s usual side job consisted of escorting human tourists who wished to become vampires to secret hiding spots. When night fell, those humans would be taken by another group of men to the Librarian’s master, who would bite them and make them his underlings. Officially, this was, of course, strictly forbidden, but so long as their activity was never brought to light, they were able to continue as they pleased.

“Skip the garbage cleanup for a bit. Three days, yes; three days should do. Everything will be over by then.”

“So what’s the gig?”

“There’s something important I need you to watch over, you and some others I’ve gathered. There’s a chance hostile forces will come and try to take it from you, in which case I want you to stop them by any means necessary.”

Connie paused. “In other words, kill them.”

“Don’t act like it’s your first time.” The Librarian’s full-

mustached lip curled into a smile, but the eyes behind his silver-green spectacles didn't even flicker. "As I recall, you killed no small number of my countrymen 150 years ago."

A mere fraction of the massacre you inflicted upon my people. Connie suppressed the urge to snap back at him. She crouched down and pulled her boots on, to prevent him from catching her facial expression.

As Connie's hatred for the Librarian swelled, so too did her anticipation. She felt a perverse sense of joy.

Soon. Soon, I will make this Englishman my prey. When Ravi delivers his verdict, I will take his revenge with my own hands.

She made a vow to herself. The next time she saw the Librarian, she would take his life.

Trying desperately not to break her façade, she spoke. "Where is it?"

"A place you pass through every day." The Librarian pointed up.

—Mack 2—

"Oh, wouldn't you know it, it happened right in front of me. Would you believe it? I was just strolling along, and these two were having a fight. Well, really one of them was just beating up the other one, and it was so obvious that this guy here was the master, you know? And then, all of a sudden the one getting bullied pulled out a

knife and—snikt!—just like that. But then, it was like he couldn't believe what he'd done, and he starts crying, like, 'Master! Master!' How can someone stab his own master? We can't do that, can we?

"Mr. Spallanzani? Never heard of him. I'll bet he's never been around here. Say, he's not bad-looking. If you find him, maybe you'll introduce us?"

Fuji Takashi had a boundless energy that belied her age. She happily answered every question put to her, but she subjected Mack to such a machine-gun-like barrage of commentary that he had to thank her and quickly take his leave for fear of drawing more attention.

"Oh yeah, like patricide, right? I feel like it pops up just about every day now. Vampires get so stuck on who's inferior and who's superior, so I guess sometimes they get a little fixated. They say it's the ones who go through too much of that who go crazy. Fang removal? What, as punishment? Must be the nice guys who do that. Most just execute 'em right then and there.

"Spallanzani? Oh yeah, I've seen the name in the directory. Sort of an eccentric guy, huh? Nah, never met him personally."

Police Inspector Hama Seiji yawned periodically, but nevertheless answered each question with jovial courtesy. He offered them some roast chicken, but they politely declined.

“Sasaki-kun was a quiet, gentle boy, easily bullied. Sadly, he remained that way even after becoming a vampire. I never could have imagined he would push the very child who bit him to such a deadly fall. Thank heavens the boy could be saved.

“Mr. Spallanzani? A nobleman, right? I saw him once, but it was many years ago...”

The elderly woman was the very picture of refinement. She shook her head apologetically.

“It’s worse than I expected. If you count the minor cases that weren’t even reported, there must be a disastrous number of rebellion incidents now.”

“Hey.”

“If this gets worse, it’ll spell the collapse of all order in the Bund. No—for all of vampirekind.”

“Hey, Pops!”

Saji, who had been writing down notes on a pad as he walked, stopped and looked over quizzically. “Yes?”

“Don’t gimme that. All the info we’ve gotten so far has to do with your case, not mine. So what the hell am I following you around like a monkey for?”

“Now now, don’t underestimate the value of learning where he isn’t. If both Inspector Hama and Fuji-san don’t know anything, Mr. Spallanzani probably hasn’t come through the Fangless district.”

Mack had already suspected that to begin with.

Spallanzani came from a noble vampire lineage. It was unlikely he would have had a sudden urge to lend his research assistance to the Fangless.

“Nothing but goddamn trouble, I tell ya. Get stuck with an asshole for a master, and you can say hello to a lifetime of shit.”

“I can’t help but keep overhearing,” Saji said over his shoulder. “You seem to have a lot of trouble with your master. Don’t tell me you’re another one of these...”

“What?” Mack’s voice made the word into a threat. “Don’t be stupid. My master’s an idiot—I’m not. Don’t lump me in with these nutbags, Pops.”

Saji frowned, perhaps because of the way Mack dug into the word “Pops.”

“If you think it’s funny, calling me that after you go around telling people not to treat you like a kid, you can think again. How old are you, anyway? I was born in 1916.”

“Me, the year the First World War ended.”

Saji flipped through his mental history book. “I’m only three years older than you!”

“Three years is a big deal. So deal with it, Pops.”

“Grr. Well then, respect your elders!” Saji jabbed him with his memo pad. “Now see if you can’t find any similar patterns here.”

The open page had a list of names like a registry. After each name was the gender, actual age, apparent age,

occupation, nationality, race, and basic medical history of each person in tiny writing.

“What’s all this?”

“A list of the people who have gone against their masters and had their teeth removed as punishment in the last month. There isn’t a single common pattern in gender, age, race, or occupation. I thought we might learn more if we included those who didn’t have their teeth removed, but most of them were killed instead for the crime of disobedience, so that’s no help. To be honest, I’m at a bit of a dead end.”

“Hmm.” Mack took the memo pad and stared at it for a while. Indeed, there was no clear pattern amongst the information. But he couldn’t bear to give it back without coming up with something. He began bending it and looking at it upside down when his cell phone rang.

“Yo, it’s me. Making progress?”

“Ah, shut up. I went to the medical center to ask for some help, and now I’m up to my ass in odd jobs. Ya really screwed me this time.”

“Good luck with that.” Harvey said, ignoring Mack’s foul mouth. “So I’ve got some news for you. Can you meet me back here?”

Mack glanced over at Saji. “If you don’t mind me bringing a tagalong.”

“So you’re a teeth-yanker, huh? There’s a service I’ll

never need.” Harvey remarked as he fiddled with Saji’s business card.

Saji was wide-eyed—either at the discovery that Mack’s master was a still-teething infant, or at the realization that that infant had his own office in the middle of the slums. Probably both.

“Folks rebelling against their masters. Come to think of it, I *have* heard a lot of that lately. I just thought it was young pukes being pukes.”

“That alone wouldn’t explain it. If there’s anything at all you know about it, it would be—”

“Hold your horses here, we’re dealing with my thing first.” Mack said, holding up a hand to silence Saji. “So what’s this news you mentioned?”

“Ah, take a look.” Harvey pulled a single sheet of paper from a drawer and slid it to Mack. On it was a cluster of dozens of numbers, typed into rows.

“These look like coordinates... ID card location data?!”

“Yep. No picnic, digging that up.”

All residents of the Bund were required to carry ID cards equipped with GPS tags. Position data updated every fifteen minutes and was recorded on a government server. However, in consideration for residents’ privacy, the recorded position had a 100-meter radial margin of accuracy.

Mack looked over the coordinates, starting with the most recent. The latest row had been recorded a few days

prior in the above-ground downtown district.

“Did he toss his card after that?” Saji said, looking over Mack’s shoulder. “Or destroy it, rather?”

“Forget that. Look at the coordinates an hour before that.”

Saji looked at the row Mack was pointing to and his face went pale. “The medical center.”

—Connie 3—

The blustering night wind was first to greet Connie as she emerged from the construction elevator, and it did so from all directions. This floor had no walls partitioning the inside from the outside, making it a perfect wind tunnel.

Walls aside, even the floor was nothing more than exposed steel deck plates. The only illumination came from the dim glow of hanging halogen lamps, and the floor was scattered with construction materials and crates.

It nevertheless offered a 360-degree view of the Bund’s night skyline. To the west stood the Bund’s tallest structure, the government building, peppered with countless dots of light. On the opposite side was a garishly glowing district. In the air above, a small blimp floated along, trailed by a dimly visible black curtain-like form beneath it. This was Stigma, being airdropped onto the downtown streets

below. Vampires were sure to be quite literally painting the town red about now.

Connie proceeded to the middle of the floor. There, several male vampires carrying guns were gathered in a circle. In the middle of the circle was a long, coffin-like object lying on its side. Next to this was a large bottle.

All of the men wore the same protective Cleaner gear as Connie. The chests and backs were numberless, meaning the gear had probably been obtained illegally.

A man sporting a ponytail approached, keeping the barrel of his submachine gun trained on her.

“Chakravarti?”

“That’s right.”

Ponytail lowered his gun. “The Librarian told us about you. Our mission is to keep watch on this guy.” He pointed to the coffin. Upon closer inspection, it was, in fact, a locker. Connie went in for a closer look.

Suddenly, the entire locker jumped with a loud crash. Even Connie took a step back in surprise.

“There’s a man inside. Master’s out for revenge,” the man said.

A muffled voice came from inside of the locker. “Someone else just showed up, right? Listen carefully. If you value your life, you’ll do well to free me at once.”

Whoever it was, he had an attitude. Connie glanced back at Ponytail. He shrugged.

“See here. Your lot may not understand the nature of

the man with whom you're in league, but I know all too well. You mustn't aid in the machinations of such men—the Bund's peril will be the only result."

The man standing directly in front of the locker picked up the bottle lying next to it. The liquid inside was a familiar color. It was Stigma.

Ponytail produced a key and opened the locker door. Inside, a man lay with his arms and legs bound, looking like a caterpillar.

"Yes, very good then. *This* is the way wise and noble vampires should behave. Now hurry and undo these ropes." The man in front of him nonchalantly thrust the bottle into his mouth.

"Gwargh!" The prisoner's eyes bulged, but the assailant grabbed his nose, and there was nothing more he could do. His throat gurgled as he gradually choked down the contents of the two- or three-liter bottle. Occasionally he gagged and tried to spit it out, only to have the fluid more forcefully poured down his throat.

After a few minutes, he'd swallowed the entire bottle. Now liberated from it, he coughed violently. "You...you mongrel! How dare you?! Do you know who I am?! Does the name Baronet Vittorio Spallanzani mean noth—"

Paying Spallanzani's words no heed, Ponytail once again shut and locked the locker door. The locker leapt a few more times before Ponytail put a stop to it with a kick.

"Don't think for a second that this roughhousing will

get you anywhere! Do you think such misconduct will go unpunished under the rule of Her Majesty? Whoever you are, you'll live to regret this!"

He had stopped moving, but the shouting carried on. Connie was beginning to grow irritable. She gestured to Ponytail's submachine gun with her chin, implying he should shut Spallanzani up.

"We were told not to cover his mouth," he said dismissively. He had misunderstood the meaning of her gesture.

"I am Spallanzani, and I fear not death! You'll achieve nothing by doing this! I know you're old enough to grasp basic reason; does this behavior not make you ashamed? With no false modesty, I have great fortune and strong allies alike. Don't think I'll let you off easy."

Spallanzani's words fell on deaf ears. He began to soften his tone. "Hey, let's discuss this. I don't know what it is you wish to achieve, but surely there's something you intend to make me do.

"Tell me what it is. You may think talking it out won't do any good, but you'd be surprised what you can learn through a simple exchange of words. Staying silent like this won't do any good for anyone."

His voice grew more heightened as he became caught up in his own oration.

"I'll say it again: I fear not death. I fear not death, but I do fear death without honor. If I die here, unbeknownst to any, it would be dishonorable. Her Majesty would never

know of my unfaltering loyalty. As her fellow subjects, you must understand the agony of this notion. Whatever your objective, when all is said and done, all that matters is whether it was in service of Her Majesty or not. As fellow vampires, I know you know this. We are—”

Connie snatched the key from Ponytail, stuck it into the lock, and flung the locker door open. Spallanzani’s face lit up. “Ahh, at least I got through to one of you. That’s my—”

Without a word, Connie swung a fist straight into the center of his face. He passed out instantly and fell silent.

Connie slammed shut the door, locked it, and let out a heavy sigh. “I didn’t cover his mouth.” She tossed the key back to Ponytail. He caught it and shrugged.

Just then, the bellowing tone of a bell rang out across the Bund, stirring up the air around Connie and the others. This was the signal that dawn was an hour away. At sunrise, their current location would be fully exposed to the sun’s rays. There was nowhere to hide. The men surrounding the locker hurriedly donned their protective hoods and face shields.

Connie, who was deeply familiar with the perils of ultraviolet rays, left her face exposed, unaffected by the men.

She was stuck on something Spallanzani had said.

“When all is said and done, all that matters is whether it was in service of Her Majesty or not.”

She looked to the eastern night sky. Moment by moment, the blue was beginning to spread.

–Mack 3–

Mack and Saji had made their way back to the medical center. After Cunningham had been filled in, he opened up his recent medical records, skimmed over them for a while, and shook his head.

“No, he wasn’t seen in any of the branches that day. And of course, I didn’t see him either.”

He swiveled the screen around to show them. It displayed a list of names and photographs, but indeed, Spallanzani was not among them.

“It’s hard to imagine, but could he have used a disguise and an alias?” Mack asked.

“I’ll thank you not to take our security measures so lightly,” Cunningham grimaced. “Not to mention, I’ve known him for thirty years. He’d need more than a little disguise.”

For certainty’s sake, Mack pulled up a map on his cellular phone. Within the same 100-meter radius as the medical center was a park and some offices—nowhere that Spallanzani would have likely paid a visit.

“Maybe he was kidnapped on his way here? No...”

“More importantly, gentlemen...” Cunningham said,

looking over the memo containing coordinates. He passed it back to them.

“Did you notice this? Look at the timestamp by his last recorded position.”

Mack and Saji looked at the number he indicated. They had only noticed the date before, but now realized that the time index had the recording logged at 5:45 AM. The two exchanged a glance. At this time of year, that would have been past sunrise. Neither Spallanzani nor anyone else could have been walking around above ground at that hour.

“No, wait a second now,” Saji said, tracing the numbers with his finger. He spoke as though his thoughts were still slowly formulating. “Supposing he was out above ground at this time of day, it may well be that he was abducted. Don’t you think the daytime outdoors would be the perfect place to keep someone captive?”

“But the Cleaners don’t miss a single spot up there during the day,” Cunningham retorted. “You couldn’t just have suspicious stuff lying around.”

“No, not necessarily.” Mack brought up the map on his phone again and zoomed in on the area surrounding the coordinates in question. It was just as he thought. “This area is still being developed. Some of the buildings there are still under construction. The Cleaners probably don’t mess around with places that don’t even have walls or floors up yet.”

Saji glanced at the clock on the wall. "It's almost sunrise. We'll have to wait for sundown again and go investigate. I'll help you, of course."

"Hey yeah, why not put your feet up awhile, maybe catch a nap?" Mack jumped to his feet, snatched his memo pad back from Cunningham, and shut his cell phone. "I spent all night helping you out. So *you* get to help me during the day."

"...Wha?"

—Connie 4—

They were entering the second evening since the lookout began.

"...From the age-old cases of Judas of Iscariot, and Brutus and Cassius of Ancient Rome, to Fouché of the French Revolution in more recent history, there have been many thought of as traitors throughout the ages. However, if you carefully consider the reasoning and emotions behind those betrayals, you'll find that there is often a sensible justification there, and that those who deem these actions as betrayals do so as a consequence of their own beliefs or ideology. For instance, Judas of Iscariot is often treated as the very embodiment of evil in human beings, but even as early as the second century at the Second Vatican Council, there have been efforts to

comprehend the reasoning behind his actions.”

“I know nothing of the Christian doctrine.”

“Ahh, my apologies. What I mean to say is that, in many cases, people see certain actions as acts of betrayal due to misunderstanding or overblown earnestness, and that it isn’t necessarily an indication of any fundamental sort of opposition. Thus, if you and I merely talk things through, we may well arrive at some sort of mutual underst—”

“We won’t.”

“That’s a hasty judgment. As I’ve said again and again, our one and only master is Her Majesty the Queen. All paths truly do lead to Rome, as they say; no matter what actions we take, they all come back around to that point, and the way I see it...”

Spallanzani’s sermon went on. Though Connie’s irritation was unwavering, she just couldn’t seem to shut herself off to him, ever since he had made that first ear-catching remark. She had begun giving curt responses whenever there was a pause in his lecture, to the point that he now directed all of his attention to her. Sooner or later, his words would burrow their way into her heart and compel her to reexamine herself.

When Connie first found out about the Bund, she had been hiding in a Mumbai slum. She had hunted down a number of members of the local organized crime syndicate, all of them humans, creating a tense climate that left her with no choice but to lay low for a while.

One day, she caught wind of the newly established Vampire Bund and of Queen Mina, which had become TV news sensations. However, her slight interest at the time was not enough to inspire her to migrate there.

Afterwards, Connie fell in with a group of Fangless in Mumbai, and learned of the long and painful history of Queen Mina and House Tepes from the group elder. She couldn't help but relate it to Lakshmi Bai, Queen of her own homeland, the kingdom of Jhansi.

Lakshmi was the daughter of royalty, but her father's kingdom had already been destroyed by the Great British Empire. She married into the kingdom of Jhansi at age fifteen, but this too was usurped by the dreaded British. She took part in a rebellion which allowed them to reclaim their palace, but, unable to take on the overwhelmingly superior military might of the British, Jhansi Palace was ultimately destroyed, its people slaughtered. She continued the resistance through guerrilla tactics, until finally her life was taken in battle. She lived a mere twenty-three years.

Many had rallied and fought for her sympathetic cause, which discriminated against neither religion nor gender. Among those who did so were Connie and Ravi. Ravi met his demise, while Connie became a vampire and lived on.

Since the fall of Jhansi Palace and the ruin of the Mughal Empire, Connie had grown disenchanted with the notion of living in allegiance to any nation. But a curiosity and desire to live under the reign of this Queen

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND

Mina welled up inside of her. In the end, she emigrated to the Bund, along with her entire Fangless community.

And now, what was she doing?

Up until now, she had continued her so-called “side work” so as to maintain a steady relationship with the Librarian, whom she would eventually make her prey. But this time, something was obviously amiss.

This wasn’t just some big shot trying to expand his influence; it was quite possibly a deep and elaborate conspiracy that threatened the very existence of the Vampire Bund. Was it not an act of malice toward the Queen to aid in such a thing?

Connie looked down to see the upper half of Ravi hunched below her. That feeling of anticipation grew less and less intense each time she saw him now. The joy of knowing she would soon take the Librarian’s life was fading.

Spallanzani launched into another spiel. The other guardsmen casually ignored him as usual.

If the Librarian’s promise of “three days” was to be trusted, something would happen tomorrow night. Whether Connie could maintain her composure that long, she wasn’t sure.

—Mack 4—

Saji could not suppress his fear. *At least let it be cloudy,*

he actually prayed. This would be his first time walking around outdoors during the day. Only a thin layer of protective gear separated him from pure death. In human terms, this was the equivalent of crossing over a river of boiling lava on a log bridge.

“Yep, that’s why Cleaning is the toughest job in the Bund. High turnover rate, and they don’t take no roll call, neither.” Mack nonchalantly brought Saji into a Cleaners’ changing room and pulled out a spare set of protective gear.

From the changing room to the elevator leading above ground, they blended in with the Cleaners without arousing an ounce of suspicion. Since they weren’t able to find gear to match Mack’s measurements, he had adjusted his sleeves and the hems of his pants with tape.

There were eight buildings still under construction within the radius of Spallanzani’s last appearance. The plan was to visit and investigate each one. Though today was dedicated to Mack’s search for Spallanzani, he couldn’t help but give some consideration to Saji’s problem as well.

“Hey, Pops.”

“What did I say about calling me th— Oh, never mind. What?”

“You know that memo pad you showed me before? Well, I just thought of something.”

“Which is?” Saji glanced over at Mack, whose expression,

of course, was obscured by the face shield.

“The ages listed on that thing—that’s the number of years since birth, right?”

“Well, yeah.”

“So did you look up the number of years since becoming vampires?”

Saji stopped in his tracks. “No... I forgot.”

“Dope,” Mack sneered. “That may well be more important than their actual age.”

“That’s true...” At some point, Saji seemed to have stopped worrying about the sunlight. “Their ages were all over the map, but come to think of it, none were younger than their forties. Perhaps the key lies in a certain amount of time passing as vampires...”

“Come on,” Mack sneered again. “If vampires got more prone to disobedience with age, House Tepes would be long dead.”

“Indeed. So it can’t just be a simple matter of time passing. Is it that not *enough* time has passed? No... perhaps the length of time passed was merely a coincidence, and the cause was something else entirely...”

“Whatever. Just remember we’re working on my problem right now. Don’t get distracted.”

Their first destination was a high-rise still under construction with more than ten stories. From the middle floor up, it was incomplete, the steel framework exposed.

“Let’s search from top to bottom,” Saji suggested. They

boarded the construction elevator and ascended to the top floor. When the doors opened, they suddenly found themselves face to face with a man whose hair was tied in a ponytail. Several other men could be seen further away.

The ponytailed man immediately tried to open fire. Saji reacted instantly, lunging forward and grabbing the man's arm. As the man began to fire wildly, Saji forcibly wrenched his arm upwards. A line of bullet holes peppered the steel-plated ceiling above.

Mack moved easily between the two larger men, slid a combat knife into the base of the assailant's jaw, and thrust upward. As he twitched in agony, Mack and Saji shielded themselves behind him and advanced toward the other men. There were no places to hide on this floor, meaning their only option was to take these men on directly.

A hail of bullets sunk into Ponytail's back. They could feel each impact through his body. As soon as he perished and turned to ash, Saji trained the submachine gun he had taken from him on the others and opened fire.

Each and every one of them fell to ash, which scattered in the wind away from the building. The floor was empty.

"Not bad, Pops," Mack said, dusting ashes off his hand.

"Yes, well, the Italian front was no picnic," Saji muttered to himself.

They spied the locker in the middle of the floor. Mack carefully approached, still gripping his combat knife.

Coming close, he peered down at it as it lay perfectly still.

A faint beam of sunlight shone onto the surface of the locker from directly overhead. And suddenly, for a moment, it turned to shadow. Mack reflexively took a step back. In his place, a humanoid figure instantaneously descended from above. It was long and slender, humanoid but with the look of a panther. Of course, it was fully concealed in protective gear and a face shield, so its facial features and age couldn't be determined.

The slender figure delivered a fierce and untelegraphed kick to Mack, sending his little body cascading through the air with no resistance. Mack, however, landed cleanly on his feet, flashed his combat knife, and pounced.

The slender figure deftly avoided Mack's barrage of slashes, backing away, until it backed into a toolbox. The figure tripped and fell backwards, scattering construction tools all over the floor with a cacophonous clatter.

Mack continued his advance.

"Look out!" Saji shouted.

The slender figure jabbed a Phillips screwdriver that had spilled out of the box at Mack's face. It pierced his face shield, gouging deep into one eye. As Mack clutched his face and stumbled about in agony, the slender figure lifted him up and slammed him at full force into the floor. Mack's tiny body bounced and tumbled, landing beside the locker.

“Mack!”

Saji ran to him and lifted him to his feet. The hole in Mack’s face shield was mostly plugged with his own blood, and he couldn’t even make out Saji’s face in front of him.

Saji picked up a roll of duct tape that had rolled nearby, pulled off a length, tore it with his teeth, and stuck it to the damaged area of the face shield. Using his own body to shield Mack from the sunlight, he pulled the shield open just a crack, pushed a handkerchief against Mack’s blood-gushing eye socket, and secured that with tape as well.

“Forget me, save yourself!” Mack shouted over the pain.

“A field medic never leaves a wounded comrade behind!”

Since Saji had cleared off the inside of Mack’s face shield, he could now see what was happening. The slender figure closed in with a confident stance. Though it was hard to admit, this final adversary was decidedly a league above the other cannon fodder in the room. Without a gun, victory seemed an impossibility.

“Pardon me for the interruption, but...” A voice emerged from the locker. Mack and Saji recoiled and looked.

“Is that Mr. Spallanzani?” Saji asked.

“The very same. I, Vittorio Spallanza— On second thought, I’ll save the introduction for later. Now, tell me: Does the adversary before you now happen to have a number five inscribed on her chest?”

“How’d you know?”

“Oh, how fortuitous. In that case, I, Spallanzani shall handle the cease-fire negotiation.”

—Connie 5—

Connie slowly advanced on the intruders. They were now leaning against the locker, having some kind of conversation. She could make out the aggravated shouting of the little one.

“What kind of a jackass is this guy?!”

“Um, she’s right in front of us. If you’re going to do something, now would be the time!” the larger one said urgently.

Connie advanced a few steps further when Spallanzani’s voice called out to her from the locker.

“You there, Number Five. As a final memento of my passing, allow me this one query, won’t you? That I failed to ask you this up front is truly the height of negligence.”

Spallanzani paused for a moment before posing his query.

“Tell me the name and home of your master.”

Connie came to a halt. The two intruders eyed her suspiciously, neither of them moving an inch.

“I’m not asking who bit you. What I’m asking is, who do you, I, and all vampires living here on this Bund claim as our master? What is her name?”

Paying no mind to Connie's silence, Spallazani continued. "Correct. It is Her Majesty, Queen Mina Tepes. Each and every vampire in this Bund is a subject of House Tepes." He was starting to gain steam. "You're the only one among the riffraff that abducted me to lend an ear. And so, I ask you now: Do your current deeds serve the will of the Queen, or don't they?"

Connie was shaken. He had come out and vocalized the very thought that he had previously planted in her head. He kept pointing the finger directly at her, and whether she liked it or not, she couldn't help but do some self-reflection.

"My dear Number Five, I'll give you a word of warning. When one is lost, one must remain faithful to one's own heart. Maintain your composure and consider what is best for Her Majesty before making a decision."

And thanks to Spallanzani's persistence, Connie finally arrived at one. "Okay," she said simply.

The larger of the two intruders let out a sigh of relief and let the strength drain from his shoulders.

"You're actually going to trust her?!" the smaller one said.

"It's not like we have much of a chance of winning, if we keep fighting like this," the big one reasoned. The small one tsked disapprovingly.

The large one helped the other back to his feet. "I'm Saji. This here is Mack," he said. As Connie tried to respond, the

little one called Mack twisted his mouth in rage.

“I don’t give a shit what your name is!!” He pointed his thumb at his own destroyed eye, then stuck out his index finger to make a gun shape and pointed it toward Connie’s eye, as if to say, “One day, I’ll have your eye for mine.”

Saji walked to the end of the floor and pushed the construction elevator call button. No response. The battery was dead.

“Backup’s coming,” Connie said.

“Let’s take the stairs. Help us out.” Saji said to Connie as he began trying to lift the locker.

“Wait, wait,” came Spallanzani’s muffled voice from inside. “You plan to fight while carrying me?”

“No choice. We don’t have protective gear for you.”

“This is no time for jokes! What if a bullet should strike me?”

“You won’t die if it doesn’t hit you in the heart,” Mack snorted. “You can put up with a little pain.”

“And I *will* die if it *does* hit me in the heart! Now just wait a—”

No longer listening, Saji and Connie hoisted up the locker from either end, but a late start on Saji’s end—the head—caused the locker to lurch. A dull thud came from within.

“Beg your pardon,” Saji mumbled, and lifted the locker all the way onto his shoulder.

NO DIFFERENT FLESH

Mack gathered the guns of the fallen lookout men and handed them off to Saji and Connie. They began to make their way down the stairs in single file, with Mack on point. Carrying the coffinlike locker through the mild sunlight, they looked like an odd funeral procession.

After descending a few floors, they felt a presence from below. Mack sneered. A man with a gun appeared on the next landing. Mack leapt up and over his head before he even had time to fire, landing behind him and slashing the man's protective gear across the back with his combat knife. His exposed back was drenched in sunlight and burst into flames.

Mack charged through the man's ashes, stirring them up into the air, and continued down the stairs.

Next came a pair that immediately opened fire. Mack wove past the gunfire and dove down the stairs headfirst. He used his sliding momentum to get underfoot and slash each of them on the ankle. Their exposed feet immediately turned to ash, knocking them off balance.

Mack used the opportunity to push them over and use his knees to break their necks against the corner of a step.

Now a group of three came charging up the stairs, firing wildly.

"Uh-oh," he said, realizing he was out of his league. He retreated back up the stairs. "Your turn, Pops!"

Saji and Connie waited for the right moment and then tossed the locker down the stairs. The metal clamored and

clanged as it ricocheted its way down.

Just as the three gunmen appeared on the landing below, the tumbling locker slammed into them. As they lay crushed beneath it, Saji and Connie took the opportunity to open fire.

Two of the gunmen were easily shot down, but the third managed to push the locker off himself and fire back. Now the locker was caught in the crossfire. It took several bullets, but Saji and Connie continued to engage. As long as they had the higher ground, they had the advantage.

Those final three gunmen were the last of the backup.

At last, they made it to the bottom floor. The sun was still high in the sky, but there was no threat of exposure here in the fully-glassed level. The three gently lowered the locker back to the floor. Thanks to their recklessness, it was now warped and full of dents and bullet holes. Connie used her key to open the lock, but the door was so warped it took the strength of all three of them to pry it open.

Spallanzani, who had been flung around wildly inside the cramped locker, was now crammed into a ball at one end, his long arms and legs hopelessly tangled. Blood ran down one arm, apparently the result of a stray bullet, and there was evidence of a graze wound on his face.

“A... a... are you trying to kill me?!!” he screamed, his mouth impossibly wide.

“Obviously we came to save you,” Mack said plainly.

“We managed to trace your footsteps here,” Saji said. “Why had you gone to the medical center the day you were abducted?”

Spallanzani used Connie’s hand to help stretch himself back out, and lay down flat inside of the locker. “Not for any personal matter. I was summoned there, so I went. That’s all.”

“Summoned? By whom?” Saji asked. Suddenly, his cell phone rang. He set it to speaker mode since his ears were still covered by the protective hood, then answered. “Saji.”

“It’s Cunningham. Where are you now?” came the voice from the speaker.

Connie didn’t believe her ears. It was the Librarian’s voice. She had never asked the Librarian about his background, and she didn’t want to. But how were these intruders connected to him?

Saji watched Connie’s reaction closely.

“Hello? Can you hear me?” came the voice identifying itself as Cunningham.

Saji answered without taking his eyes off Connie. “Right now, we’re at the corner of Martin and Simmons. We’re about to investigate the nearest construction site.”

It was a fabrication. This location was a block away from the one he’d described.

“I see. It’s very dangerous up there in the daylight. Be careful.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll let you know if we find Mr.

Spallanzani.”

He hung up the phone. Immediately, another phone began ringing. Reflexively, Connie put a hand to her hip. She pulled out her own cell phone, set it similarly to speaker, and answered.

“Where are you now?” It was the Librarian. And indeed, he had the same voice as the previous caller. A surprised Mack glanced back and forth between Saji and Connie.

Saji turned to Connie and put an index finger to his lips.

“Still playing lookout,” she answered plainly.

“Two intruders are on their way to you. When you see them, be sure to kill them. Don’t take any prisoners.” The voice giving these orders was Cunningham’s, to be sure, but his tone seemed different. It had a snideness that unmistakably belonged to the Librarian.

Connie ended the call and quietly lowered the hand holding the phone. All present were silent for a while.

Still lying inside the locker, Spallanzani cleared his throat. “Well,” he said awkwardly. “It would appear that you’ve all been reporting to the same master.”

“Don’t lump me in with these guys!” Mack snapped.

—Mack 5—

Fortunately, one of Mack’s hideouts was just half

a block away. The four of them headed there to take a breather.

“All of this is connected with the Stigma currently in circulation.” No sooner had Spallanzani gulped down his water than the words began gushing out again like a burst dam. “As you ladies and gentlemen are well aware, Stigma is a nutrient fluid mass-produced through the interaction between a genetically-enhanced type of red algae known as *Lorentia Sanguinalis* and its surrounding seawater. It was none other than my colleagues and I who developed this method thirty years ago, but what we didn’t know was that there was a severe pitfall there. You see, a certain type of phycobilisome unique in red algae will—”

“Hold up, hold up! This isn’t study hall, so could we have the short version, please?!” Mack shouted.

“Shorter than this?” Spallanzani said glumly. “Well, essentially, there is a major flaw in the Stigma currently in circulation.”

“Which is?”

“Well, as you are well aware—”

Saji immediately stopped him. “You can tell us all about the theory behind it later. For now, just the bottom line, please.”

“Well then, to make a long story short,” Spallanzani said, clearing his throat. “If you continue to imbibe Stigma over a long period of time, it will eventually cause your blood to undergo a change in quality. Consequently,

it will become unable to maintain the imprint of one's master flowing within that blood."

"Meaning?"

"If you keep drinking it, your loyalty to your master may begin to fade. In some cases, it will be severed completely."

"What the hell?!" Mack raised his voice, forgetting they were in hiding.

A vampire's blood tie with their master was a fundamental building block of vampire society. If that fell apart, society itself would be flipped on its head. Both Saji and the Indian woman were stunned.

"Of course, it's not that simple. Each vampire reacts differently, and it could take as long as thirty years for the effects to even appear. The effects are also weakened if the vampire consumes other types of food as well. Indeed, the influence was so slight that not a single one of us involved in this research even noticed."

"Just a moment," Saji said, his face growing pale. "From what you're saying, those most likely to be affected are those who have consumed nothing but the current formula of Stigma, and who have been doing so for about thirty years. Correct?"

"That's right."

"But that means just about anyone who established blood ties to House Tepes thirty years ago!"

The impact of Saji's words wasn't lost on Mack. Thirty

years ago, it was the advent of Stigma's mass production that breathed life back into House Tepes. In a plot to recover their role as one of the Three Great Clans, they subsequently began a period of rapid growth. Those who became vampires during that period wound up on the front lines of this expansion movement, and it was this vintage of vampires who were responsible for the majority of operations and business management inside of the Bund. If those vampires were to lose their blood loyalty, the Bund would almost immediately cease to function.

"So all those master killers were the unlucky ones then," Mack groaned. "But what's the point? The Bund will fall apart, but what does Cunningham stand to gain?"

"Well, there's more," Spallanzani said, lowering his voice. "When a vampire undergoes the loss of blood ties, his blood's genetic makeup becomes very unstable. If even a trace amount of DNA from another vampire enters his blood when it's in this state, he will acknowledge this new vampire as his master."

There was a long silence.

A grim picture was forming in Mack's head as Spallanzani went on.

"Has Cunningham himself undergone the effects of the Stigma?" he asked.

Spallanzani nodded. "Most likely. We should probably assume he no longer maintains a blood tie to anyone."

"And now he's trying to get his DNA into the unstable

blood of the Bund's vampires."

"Most assuredly." Spallanzani nodded again. "He's trying to become a new 'True Ancestor.'"

A terrible grinding sound filled the room. Mack looked up, startled. The Indian woman wore an expression of astounding fury, grinding her teeth nearly hard enough to pulverize them into powder.

"Three days..." she uttered through her clenched jaw. She shot Spallanzani a piercing gaze. "When you were captured, he told me to keep watch for just three days. Today is the third."

It was a voice straight from the belly of Hell, but Mack realized that for the first time she was cooperating in the sharing of information. "So something should happen today, then," he said. But no one could guess what that "something" was. The group once again fell silent.

"Exactly how would one 'get one's DNA' into another vampire's blood?" This time, it was Saji's turn to ask.

"The surest method would be a syringe. But even a minuscule amount would probably do the trick. For instance, if he slashed someone with a blade covered in his own blood. That would probably be quite effective."

"A blade. Do you suppose he'd just choose random victims on the street?" Mack asked.

"It seems of little consequence either way," Saji replied. "He would have to claim dominance over a great number of vampires all at once for there to be any significant effect."

“Let me ask you...” Spallanzani started, turning to Saji. “The blimp that scatters Stigma over the downtown district. When does that come around again?”

“Generally around 2 AM,” Saji answered curiously. “Of course, that’s also operated by the medical center, so I suppose the chief-of-staff can do whatever he pleases with it. Why? Do you think he’s going to do something with the blimp?”

“Well, not necessarily, but...” Spallanzani scratched his head.

“You see, Mr. Cunningham is a hopeless film buff. And when we used to work together, he exposed me to all kinds of movies. Among them, I seem to recall one in which someone packed a load of bombs and darts into a blimp, then blew it up, causing grievous casualties to the onlookers below.”

Everyone’s faces went pale.

“...So is that the theory?” Mack asked, looking at each of them.

Saji took out his cell phone, shaking his head. “In any case, we should suspend today’s distribution. It’s a bold move, but if we make a direct appeal to the Queen, we should be able to...”

He pressed the phone to his ear as he was talking, his expression gradually growing stern. After about ten seconds, he hung up, looking annoyed. “Can’t connect. Guess we’ve got no choice but to go there ourselves.

The sun's already set."

They proceeded back outside, but immediately stopped in their tracks. To the left and to the right, a mob of half-crazed vampires flooded the streets. Some were screaming with arms folded, others were swarming hapless victims.

The group frantically made for the back exit as Saji made another call, this time to a colleague. Now the color truly faded from his face.

"Her Majesty has fallen ill. They don't know the cause, but she's lost consciousness.

The woman and Spallanzani both fell to the ground as their knees buckled.

Listening more carefully, it became apparent that the crazed vampires flooding the streets were each screaming the name of the Queen. They were gathered and weeping for her, grabbing and pummeling any suspicious-looking vampires lurking about, claiming it was in the name of Her Majesty.

Even Mack could feel the strength draining from his body, but mustered enough courage to hold his ground.

"Is this the doing of Cunningham?"

"I don't know. I just don't know..." The strength had left Saji.

Mack drew in a deep breath and screamed at the top of his lungs. "PULL YOURSELVES TOGETHER, GODDAMMIT!!"

As if struck by lightning, the other three snapped back

to their senses and looked at him.

“Don’t you guys see this is it? If this turns out to be a coincidence, I’ll let you tear my heart out and keep it. Cunningham’s going to use that blimp to do something while everyone’s running wild out here. And if the Queen’s incapacitated, that means we’re the only ones who can stop him.”

“...!”

The strength returned to their eyes. The woman arose, followed by Spallanzani.

“I’ll head back to the medical center,” Saji said. “Mr. Cunningham should still be there at this hour. I’ll hold him, even if it comes down to brute force.”

“In that case, I shall accompany you,” Spallanzani said. “I know a thing or two about that man.”

“I’ll take care of the blimp. Show me where it docks. You coming along?”

Connie nodded. “I’ll go get my weapons. See you there.”

The two shared a silent moment of eye contact. A moment later, the group split in three directions and dashed off into the night.

—Connie 6—

Descending back underground, Connie discovered

that the situation was not quite as chaotic here as it was outside, though there were anxious vampires wandering and pacing about. There were groups engaged in physical confrontations here and there as well, and the VGS and Beowulf were running around hectically, trying to mediate.

Guard soldiers scattered across the street eyed Connie's protective gear suspiciously, but none called out to detain her. She made it back to her living quarters and immediately went for the closet, where she pulled out her "war attire," which she always took on hunts—a tank top, cargo pants, medium-length boots, and a quiver. All were uniformly black and well suited to her dark cocoa skin.

She removed twenty or so arrows from a box hidden deep within the closet. The homemade arrowheads came in a variety of shapes and sizes, each possessing different attributes pertaining to power and distance.

She placed the arrows in her quiver, hung it off her waist, and went to the wall furthest from the entrance. The final and most essential piece of equipment was hanging there as a decoration.

The composite bow was a traditional weapon of the Mughal Empire. Made of a wooden core and many layers of bovine Achilles tendons, these bows possessed an incredible shot distance and piercing ability, in spite of their small size, holding up against even the guns of the British.

NO DIFFERENT FLESH

The bow was the only thing Connie had held onto after becoming a vampire. There was nobody left in the human world to pass down the craft of forging these bows, but Connie continued to take meticulous care of hers and still used it to carry out her hunts.

She always went through the same emotions standing before her bow like this, preparing for a hunt. The despair over her lost lover Ravi, now a rotting apparition; the hope that he would soon return to the spirit world; and the anticipation of stalking her prey.

But today was different. Until yesterday, “the Queen,” in Connie’s mind, was Lakshmi Bai. Now it was different. Now it was Queen Mina. She had to fight for Queen Mina.

150 years ago, Connie had failed to protect Lakshmi and Jhansi. She wouldn’t fail to protect Mina and the Bund. Resolute, she reached up now and removed the bow from its rack.

—Mack 6—

Docked at its station on the southern end of the Bund, the blimp looked like a blue whale rolled over on its side. To prevent it catching any wind, it had been lowered almost to the ground, its bow anchored to a red and white docking tower. The tower sat atop a trailer, so that

it could be moved around. Several cars were parked in the surrounding vicinity, along with a number of people milling about.

Mack and the defector woman were observing all this from the roof of a building approximately 200 meters away.

“I don’t like it,” Mack muttered as he looked through a pair of binoculars. Of course, the eye that the woman had mangled was now covered with a makeshift black eye patch.

“Looks like normal takeoff procedure to me,” she said, looking out over the same scene with her naked eye. She must have had keen vision.

“Look at that guy who’s a little separated from everyone else. On the far right.”

The woman took the binoculars from Mack and had a look. A single man stood silhouetted in the moonlight. He was unmistakably armed with an assault rifle.

“Awfully heavy security for a normal blimp takeoff. And y’know what else?” Mack looked back towards the downtown district. “There’s no way they’d still be taking off according to plan after hearing all that.”

Maybe it was due to the direction of the wind, but they could clearly make out the sounds of the ensuing chaos, violence, gunshots, and even explosions coming from the heart of the Bund.

“There’s no doubt about it though; those guys are gonna

fly. You know what to do, right?”

The woman nodded.

Their battle strategy meeting upon regrouping had lasted about a minute. Mack had his combat knife, the woman her bow, so the strategy basically spelled itself out. Mack blanched at the site of the ancient-looking bow, but the woman's genuine confidence convinced him to place faith in her.

“Be sure you don't hit me.” Mack turned his cap backwards and leapt down from the roof. He quickly rose back to his feet and ran straight for the man with the assault rifle he'd seen through the binoculars.

When he was ten or so meters from the guard, the guard became aware of him and attempted to take aim with his assault rifle. Just then, something from behind whizzed past Mack's temple.

A single arrow struck the guard in the chest. He fell backwards and turned to ash before even hitting the ground.

Mack dashed onward, stepping over the ashes and rifle without reducing his speed for even a moment.

Straight ahead, a man climbed up the docking tower and began to cut the blimp loose from its anchor point. It must have been time for takeoff. Mack put all his strength into his legs and charged into the station.

The second vampire had his back turned to Mack. Mack rammed his entire body into him and sunk the combat

knife deep into his back.

At this point, the other vampires in the docking station became aware of Mack's assault. Several of them pulled guns from their holsters and took aim at him. A barrage of arrows flew through the air, felling each of them almost simultaneously.

The man in the docking tower finally realized what was happening below and frantically began trying to untether the blimp.

The woman sent an arrow straight and true through his chest. It must have missed his heart, however, as he did not immediately turn to ash. He stumbled forward and fell, still gripping the wire tethering the blimp to the tower.

The wire came loose, freeing the blimp from the tower. Since the engine and propellers were already running, it gradually began moving forward. The cockpit, which was mere inches off the ground, began to rise.

"Shit!" Mack charged towards the blimp and used his momentum to leap up from beneath it. He soared five meters up and clung to the outside of the cockpit door. He peered through the window to see a single man sitting in the pilot's seat at the narrow end of the cockpit.

Mack's cap caught the wind and blew off. "Shit!" He bashed through the window glass with the hilt of his combat knife and rolled head-first inside.

The man in the pilot's seat drew a gun and shot at

Mack without taking his attention off the controls. Mack dodged the shot by a hair and closed in on him. Before the pilot could squeeze off another shot, Mack slashed him in the hand. The pilot dropped his gun. He jumped up and grabbed ahold of Mack. Mack went for his throat with the knife, but his aim was slightly off due to the loss of his eye.

His small frame and short limbs also put him at a disadvantage when it came to close combat. The pilot wrenched his arm up, forcing him to drop the knife.

Mack was shoved back toward the window by his tall opponent, who then tried to push his face into the broken window glass. As Mack struggled desperately, out of the corner of his remaining eye he saw his counterpart dashing into the station, bow in hand. She scanned the area as she ran, clearly looking for something.

The pilot made a final forceful shove, pushing Mack's face into the glass shards. Try as he might to resist, Mack felt the glass sink into his cheek.

Suddenly the cockpit leaned sharply to one side. The pilot stumbled off balance, and Mack didn't miss his opening. He leg-swept his opponent and shoved him down.

He immediately retrieved his fallen combat knife and slammed it into the pilot's chest as the pilot tried to regain his footing.

Mack flopped down on the slanting floor, his head

covered in ash. At last, he had a moment to breathe (so to speak), so he peered outside to see what had happened. A wire was wrapped around one of the propellers, stopping it. The wire stretched back down to the ground, where it was attached to a car. Evidently the woman had tied this to an arrow and shot the propeller.

She stood below with her bow, looking up at Mack. Mack leapt down from the cockpit and made his way over to her. Wordlessly, she offered Mack his cap. He accepted it and placed it neatly back on his head.

“I don’t know what they do in India, but...” he took her hand and curled it into a fist. He lightly bumped it with his own fist, and flashed a smile that matched his childlike appearance. “Ya did good.”

Mack’s phone began to vibrate. It was Saji.

“Mr. Cunningham’s escaped!” Saji blurted out, not even bothering to confirm that it was Mack on the other end. “I explained everything to Beowulf, but their hands are full with the rioting. I think he might have headed toward you and—”

Suddenly Mack’s phone burst to smithereens. Before he could even guess what had happened, he was struck all over by a countless barrage of impacts. He flew off his feet and fell hard to the ground.

The sound of gunfire filled the air.

He mustered the remainder of his strength to raise his head. The woman was also riddled with bullets and

about to collapse. Desperate to somehow fight back, Mack reached for the handle of his combat knife, and lost consciousness.

–Connie 7–

When Connie regained consciousness, she found herself lying on her back, gazing up at the night sky. She had no control of her limbs. She could feel her vitality draining away through the countless holes in her body. Even lifting her head was a challenge, but she mustered enough strength to scan her surroundings.

Mack lay motionless on the ground a short distance away. Connie could see blood oozing out in a pool beneath him, but the fact that he hadn't yet turned to ash meant he was at least still alive.

Connie averted her gaze and turned her head to see a man shuffling towards her. The Librarian. His eyes were wide with fury, his white fangs poking out from the gap between his beard and mustache. His usual refined, scholarly aura had dissipated entirely, and it dimly dawned on Connie that this was the true form of the Librarian—or rather, of Cunningham.

Cunningham gripped an assault rifle with both hands. He made no move fire it, possibly because he had already emptied the entire clip into them.

Connie painfully hoisted her body up and picked up an arrow lying beside her. She tried to notch it in the bow that she had been gripping with her left hand all along.

The bow was too light.

Only half the bow remained, the rest most likely destroyed by gunfire. The shortened bowstring drooped loose and powerless, and the handle had been reduced to a slightly arched stick, splinters of tendon protruding from the cracked cross-section. It was in no condition to be fired.

When Connie looked up again, the Librarian was right in front of her. He held the gun by its body and swung it at her, smashing the stock into her face.

Blood spurted from her nose as she fell once again onto her back. The Librarian had the face of a demon as he slammed the rifle down on her again and again. "Stay out of my way! YOU! FILTHY! N*****!"

Connie feebly raised her arms to protect herself, but there was virtually nothing she could do but succumb to the beating. The Librarian's voice blurred together with the blunt sound of the rifle stock smashing into her bones.

He tossed his gun aside now and mounted her stomach. Now he began beating her with his bare fists. "We had a nuisance like you thirty years ago." He was raving, drunk off his own violence. "I'd discovered in Stigma the key to becoming the True Ancestor. But the fool deemed it

a 'flaw' and tried to announce it to the whole world! Do you have any idea how much trouble I went through to intercept the report and frame that obsolete old faggot?! HUH?!"

Connie barely understood him. He seemed to be confessing some past evil deed.

The Librarian picked up a rock lying beside him and lifted it with both hands over his head. His face tightened and twisted into a cold-blooded grin. "And now it's your turn to pay!! Join your pathetic Jhansi queen in Hell!!"

That instant, Connie's eyes flashed with fury. She swung up the arrow she was still gripping with her right hand, stabbing it through the Librarian's neck. The arrowhead pierced through one side of the neck and out the other. As she pulled it out again, blood fountained from both holes.

The Librarian's eyes bulged as he dropped the rock and clasped his hands to the holes in his neck. He tried to scream, but only black blood erupted from his mouth.

The Librarian's blood splashed over Connie's face. She shoved his writhing body off and jumped up, this time mounting him. Pain from her gunshot wounds flashed through her body like sparks, but her Mughal warrior blood pushed her onward. She gripped arrows in either hand and began stabbing them into the Librarian's face and chest. She punctured an eye and put countless deep lacerations in his forehead and cheeks, splattering dark

red blood all over his body. His once refined mustache was now plastered to his face, smeared with blood and fat.

Connie waited for the Librarian's writhing to settle before eyeing his heart and swinging her arm back for the final blow.

Her arm froze. Two sandaled feet appeared at the Librarian's head. Connie looked up in astonishment. Ravi stood there, looking down upon her. He looked exactly as he had in life, just before the Englishman ended it.

He smiled warmly, looking her over with the clear dark eyes she knew from before his passing. It was the first time she'd seen him intact since the day of his execution. Tears poured out of her eyes and streamed down her scarred cheeks, mixing with blood. She had kept up the hunt for years, believing that this day would come, and now here it was.

Suddenly it struck her. The reason she performed these hunts was to send Ravi back to the spirit world. If she killed the Librarian now, she would have to say farewell to her love.

To a normal person, it would have seemed illogical logic. But Connie's aching heart had been bound by this principle for 150 years. She wanted to toss aside her arrow and throw herself upon him.

It was Connie's sworn loyalty to Queen Mina Tepes that stopped her from doing so. If she didn't kill the Librarian

here and now, if she let him slip through her fingers, he was sure to endanger the queen once again.

In an objective measure of time, Connie's internal conflict lasted only a second, but it was enough to still her hand. The Librarian seized the momentary opening when her gaze shifted away from him to quietly produce a small pistol from his inner breast pocket. Small enough to fit in the palm of his hand, it wasn't the most intimidating firearm, but a straight shot through the heart would spell the end for any vampire.

His remaining eye blazed from amid the bloodied and rent flesh that was now his face. The gun barrel slowly pinpointed Connie's chest. Their eyes met. Returned now to her senses, Connie stabbed the arrow at his heart.

A gunshot.

—Mack 7—

His limbs were cold. That aside, he felt nothing.

He had felt this sensation before. Ages ago, in the sewers of New York. Just like now, he had found himself lying there, unable to feel anything beyond an icy chill through his arms and legs. As he recalled, he was at death's door from hunger that time. So what about now?

“...! ...!”

Suddenly his consciousness returned. Somebody was

shaking him by the shoulders.

“Mack! C’mon, Mack! Come back to me, please!”

“...Jeez, will ya pipe down, Pops?”

Mack opened his eyes and discovered a blue-faced Saji peering back at him. Once their eyes met, Saji let out a heavy sigh of relief and went limp. Mack wanted to laugh at him, but stopped as a sharp pain suddenly shot through his numb limbs.

“Owwwww.”

“What’d you expect? He turned your body into a honeycomb. All I’ve done is temporarily dress the wounds, so lie still.”

Now the agony really started to set in. Mack wasn’t just in pain; it was as though he’d become pain itself. He took a look around with a wince, discovering that the smell of gun smoke in the air had fully cleared now, and there were a large number of young men in gray suits briskly patrolling the area.

“Beowulf showed up? I guess that’ll take care of things then... What about Cunningham?”

Saji silently pointed to a pile of ashes and familiar charcoal gray clothes. The ashes were neatly laid out in the shape of a person, with an arrow sunken deep into the pavement, right where the heart would have been.

“The Queen has regained consciousness, and the rioting is starting to settle. Everything’s all right now.”

“...What happened to the lady?”

Saji shook his head. "That's only enough ashes for one, so I don't think she's dead, but..."

Mack was struck by the mental image of her dark, stately, and utterly unfriendly profile. He mustered enough strength to sit up and call her name, but found himself struck speechless. He didn't even know her name, and it was he who had interrupted her when she tried to tell them.

"Whatsamatter? You look like you just got dumped," came a youthful, high-pitched, nasal voice from the direction of Mack's dead eye. He strained to turn his head. There before him was an adorable but sneering baby, riding atop of a baby carriage, cigar in mouth.

Beside the carriage, Spallzani pushed a wheelchair. Seated in the wheelchair was an elderly bald-headed man Mack didn't recognize.

"Who's this old coot?"

"Don't be rude, idiot. He's the one who hired us for this job."

"What?! Then you mean..." Saji quickly jumped to his feet and drew himself straight. Mack, however, continued to scrutinize the man suspiciously. He didn't have the strength to stand up even if he'd wanted to, and more importantly, he wasn't interested in paying any amount of respect. As far as he was concerned, the geezer in the wheelchair was responsible for this entire nightmare, thirty years in the making.

“Sorry for all the trouble, Harvey my lad,” said the old man.

“It’s no trouble, as long as you’re payin’,” Harvey said. “Now if this guy’d just stayed dead, I could’ve kept the whole pot.”

“Shaddup.” Any display of anger would just make the pain worse. Mack had to settle for a crummy comeback.

“What will be done about the Stigma?” Saji asked as he began changing Mack’s bandages.

“Nothing,” the old man answered plainly. “There’s another way to produce it using a certain breed of agave plant. It’s already set for practical application, and facilities abroad have already begun the transition. The Bund will no doubt begin renovation of its production plant in the near future. Once people start drinking the new Stigma, their blood will return to normal over time.”

“They’re already that far along? I can’t...” Saji fell speechless.

“Of course, it did take thirty years for anyone to notice,” the old man said, knitting his brow. “We were scrambling to begin preparations for the transition, but the medical center wasn’t doing anything about it. I thought it strange and ordered this investigation, and well, you know the rest.”

He pointed a bony finger at Spallanzani behind him, who cleared his throat awkwardly. “If I’d been able to use this guy a little more, it would have saved you all a

boatload of trouble.”

“He ain’t kiddin’.” Mack fully agreed.

A member of Beowulf approached the wheelchair and quietly offered something.

“What’s this?” the old man asked.

“It was found inside the blimp. There was a bomb set to go off, along with a few tens of thousands of these things. He was most likely hoping to injure a large number of vampires at once and place them all under his control.” The tan, silver-haired soldier held up a large dart. Unlike sgaming darts found in bars and the like, it was made of solid blackish chrome, from tip to wings.

“*Black Sunday*,” Spallanzani muttered, staring agape at the dart. His meaning was unclear.

“Ah. I guess that night was just as memorable for old Cunningham,” the old man nodded.

Spallanzani leaned forward over the wheelchair. “Sir, by any chance were you already aware of the problem with the Lorentia method back then?”

“Don’t overestimate me,” he grinned. “If I’d been that perceptive back then, I would have put a stop to it, regardless of the circumstances.”

As the two of them immersed themselves in impenetrable conversation, a medical technician finally made his way around to Mack. Mack’s light body was easily lifted and rushed to an ambulance. He looked up at Saji, who ran alongside the stretcher, and managed to

feebly lift his hand. Saji took it with his own.

“Doctor Saji. Find that woman. Please.”

Saji gave a silent nod. Mack returned the nod and released his hand.

Harvey joined him aboard the ambulance, and the door was closed. Mack took a heavy sigh as the siren blared and the sterile smell of medicine filled the air around him.

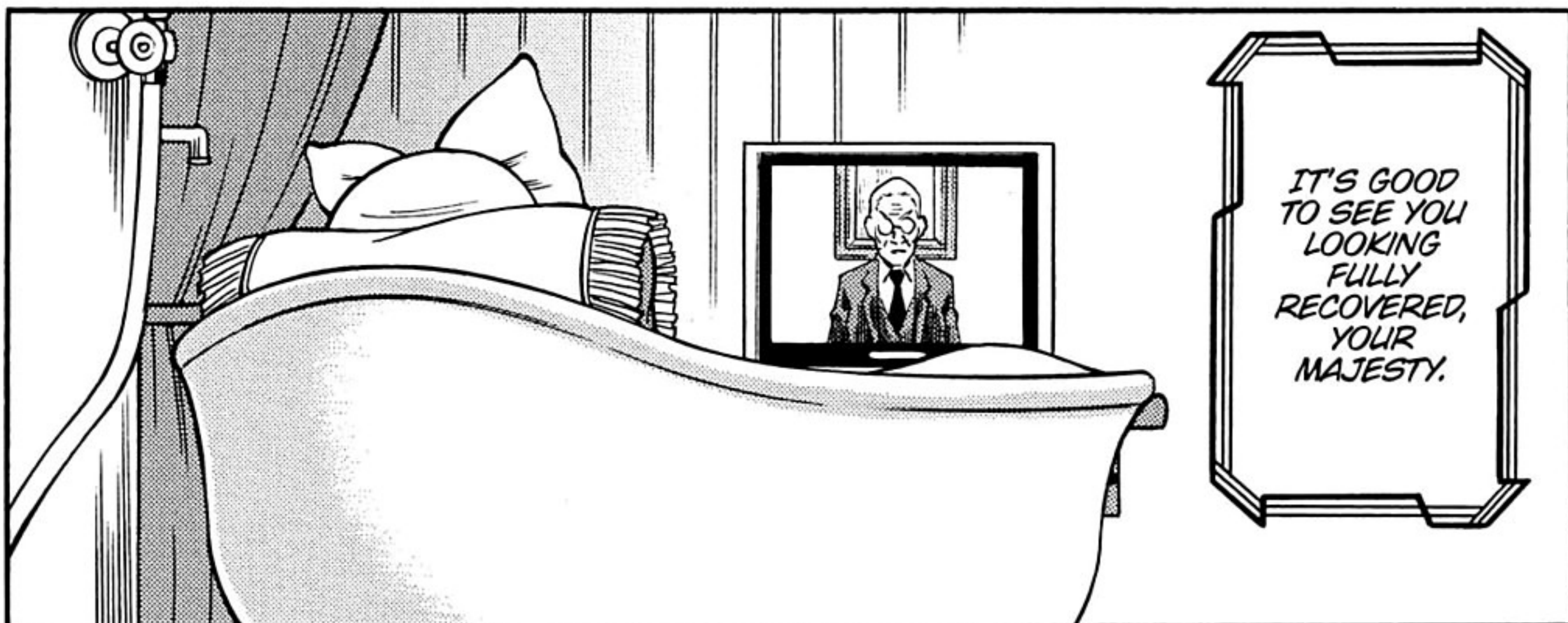
“Asshole. I’m never doing this again.”

“Better not,” Harvey replied instantly. “If you injure yourself like this every time, I’ll end up spending more than I’m making off ya. Do it right next time.”

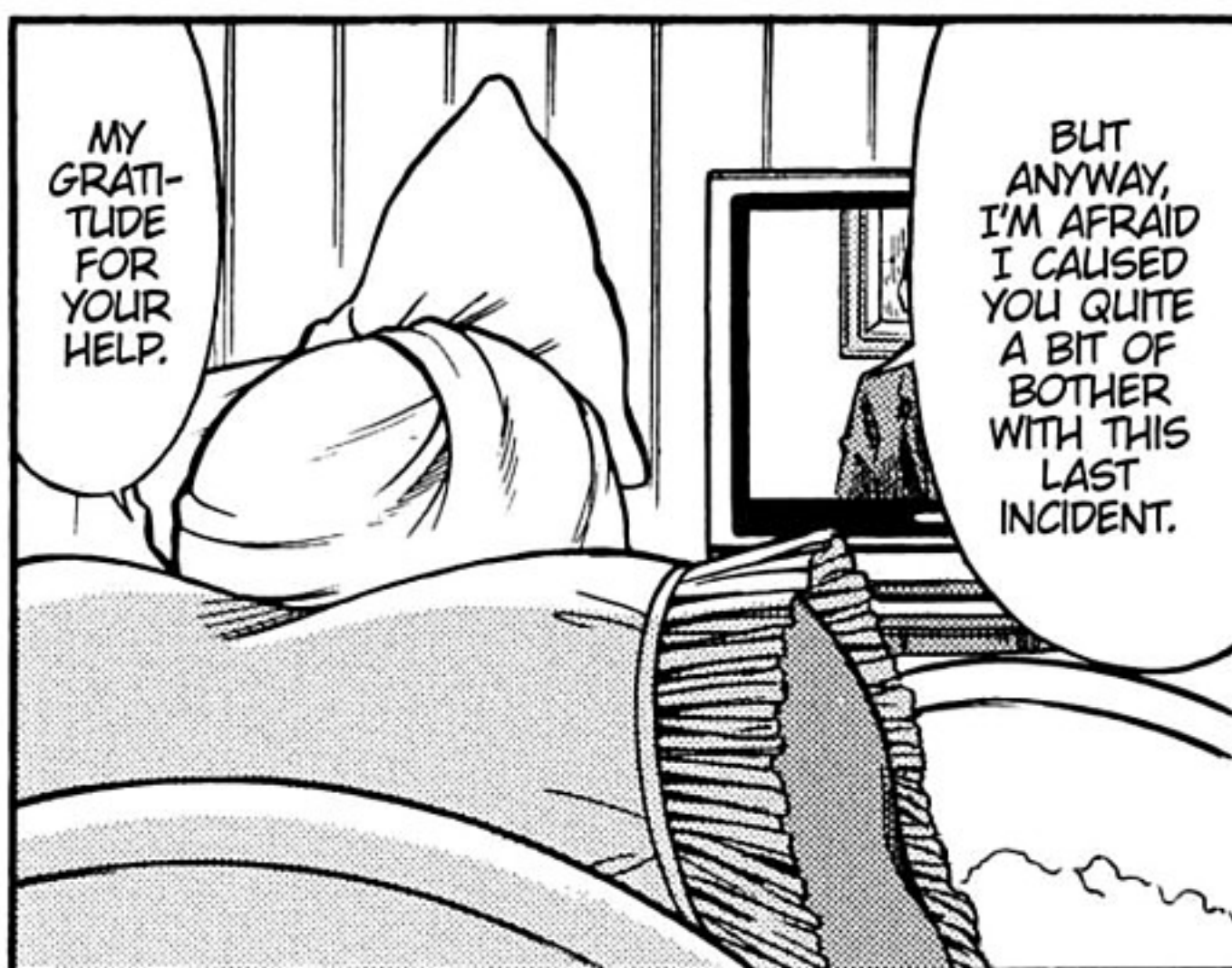
“Why you... I’d like to see *you* go through this sometime.”

Mack felt a sting run through his arm, and realized he’d been anesthetized. Gradually, his pain began to fade along with his consciousness.

“I tell ya... Get an asshole for a master, and all you get is trouble...” With that one final murmur, Mack faded to sleep.



IT'S GOOD
TO SEE YOU
LOOKING
FULLY
RECOVERED,
YOUR
MAJESTY.



MY
GRATI-
TITUDE
FOR
YOUR
HELP.

BUT
ANYWAY,
I'M AFRAID
I CAUSED
YOU QUITE
A BIT OF
BOTHER
WITH THIS
LAST
INCIDENT.



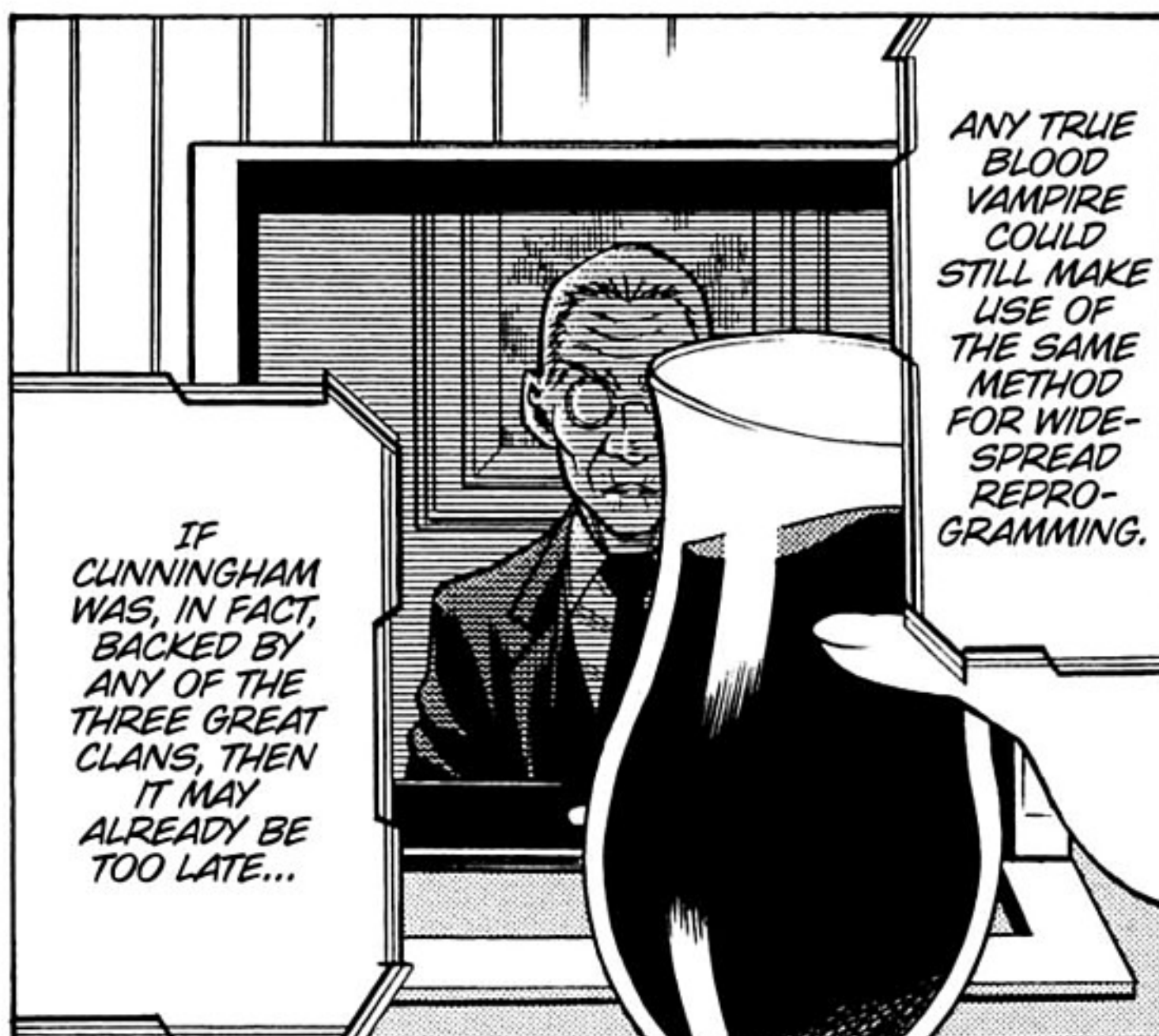
ALL OF THIS
COULD
HAVE BEEN
FORESTALLED,
HAD I SIMPLY
THOUGHT
A LITTLE
HARDER
ABOUT
STIGMA'S
INHERENT
PROPERTIES.

NO, NO. IT'S
ALL RIGHT.
THEY DID
MANAGE TO
SURPRISE ME,
AFTER ALL.



HEH
HEH...
MY THANKS,
DOCTOR,
AND
PARDON MY
APPEARANCE.

IT SEEMS
MY DREAMS
INDUCED
SOME NIGHT
SWEATS,
AND I FELT
THE NEED
FOR A BATH.



IF CUNNINGHAM WAS, IN FACT, BACKED BY ANY OF THE THREE GREAT CLANS, THEN IT MAY ALREADY BE TOO LATE...

ANY TRUE BLOOD VAMPIRE COULD STILL MAKE USE OF THE SAME METHOD FOR WIDE-SPREAD REPRO-GRAMMING.



A NEW VERSION OF STIGMA, BASED UPON DRACAENA, IS ALREADY IN PRODUCTION.

AS THIS DISSEMINATES THROUGHOUT THE POPULATION, IT SHOULD PREVENT ANY RELAPSES BY COMMON VAMPIRES.

HOW-
EVER
...



I HIGHLY DOUBT ANY OF THEM WOULD EVER CONSIDER ALLOWING SO GRANDIOSE A PLOT AS TO CREATE A NEW TRUE BLOOD.

THAT, MY GOOD DOCTOR, IS NOT SOMETHING YOU NEED FRET ABOUT.



CUNNINGHAM WAS IN THE PERFECT PLACE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT...

A LITTLE TOO PERFECT FOR IT TO BE COINCIDENCE, DON'T YOU THINK?



IT DOES SEEM LIKE A SCHEME THOSE FACELESS SPECTERS WOULD COOK UP, DOESN'T IT?

WHICH MEANS MY COMA MAY, IN FACT, HAVE BEEN CONTRIVED FOR SOME OTHER REASON ENTIRELY.



IN WHICH CASE ...

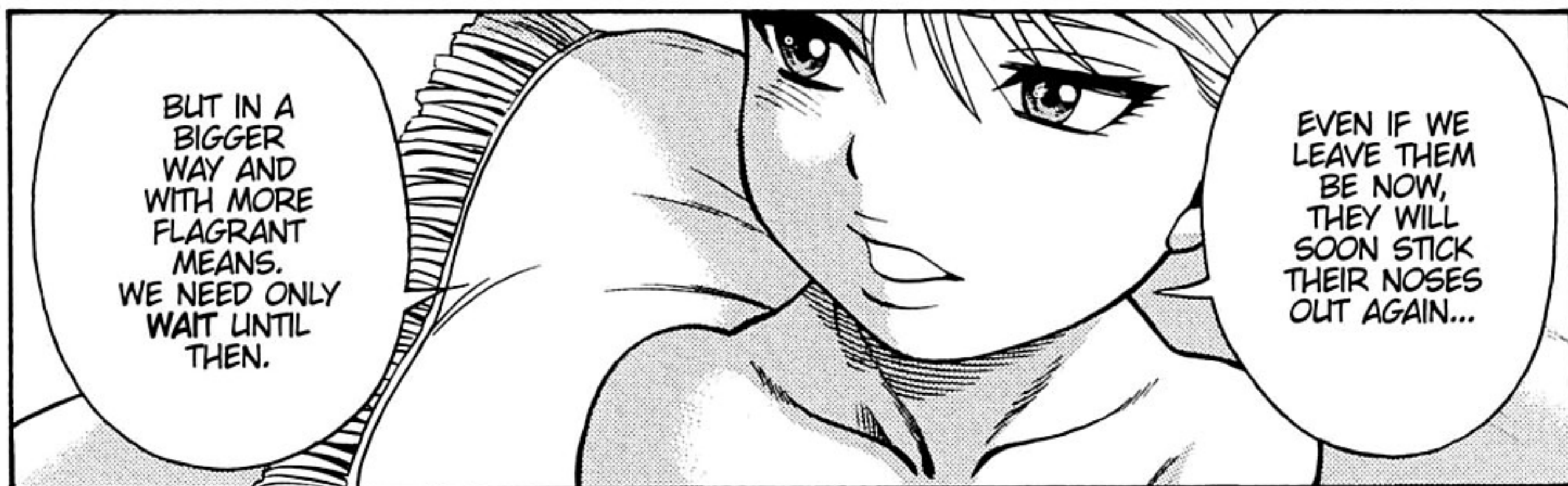
THE LIKE-
LIEST
SUSPECT
IS
TELO-
MERE.



READING
TOO FAR INTO
A MYSTERY
DEPRIVES
IT OF ALL
SENSE OF
SUSPENSE.

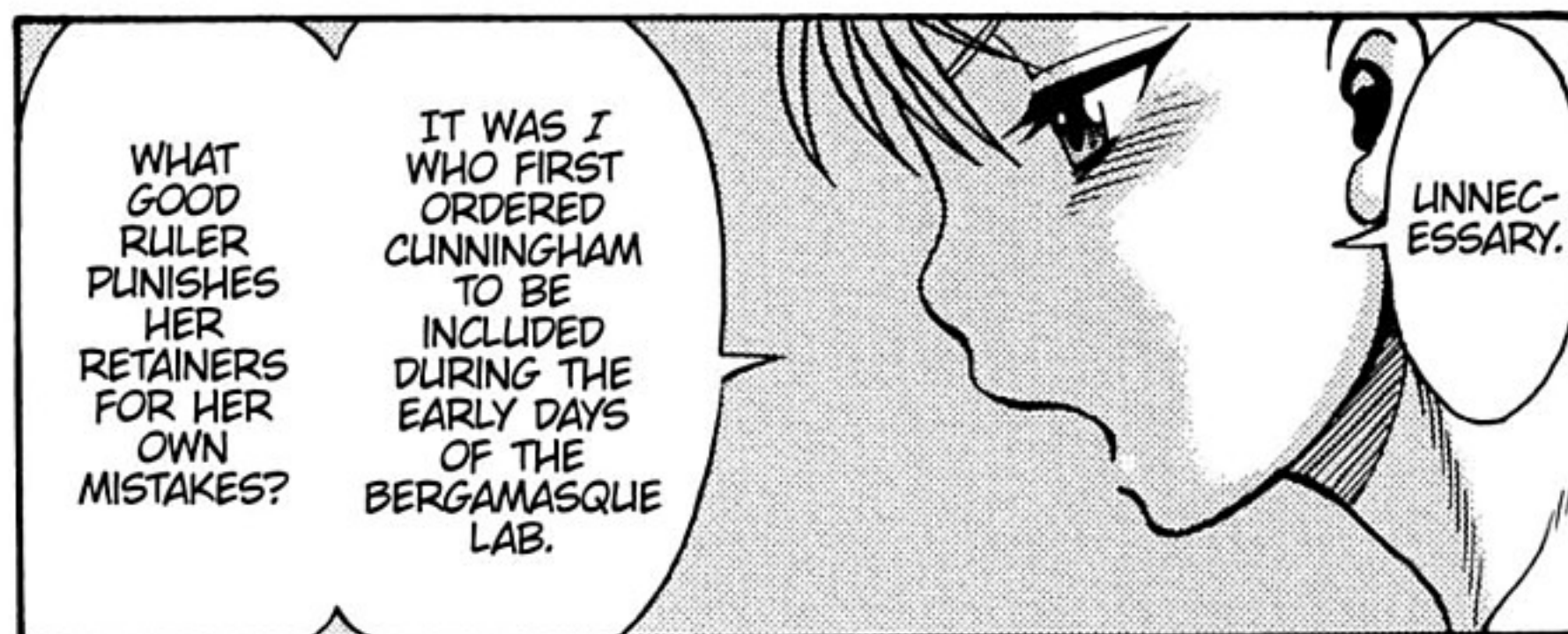
THERE IS
NO NEED TO
RUSH TO
CONCLUSIONS
YET.

SO ALL
WENT
AS TELO-
MERE
PLANNED,
YES?



BUT IN A
BIGGER
WAY AND
WITH MORE
FLAGRANT
MEANS.
WE NEED ONLY
WAIT UNTIL
THEN.

EVEN IF WE
LEAVE THEM
BE NOW,
THEY WILL
SOON STICK
THEIR NOSES
OUT AGAIN...



WHAT
GOOD
RULER
PUNISHES
HER
RETAINERS
FOR HER
OWN
MISTAKES?

IT WAS I
WHO FIRST
ORDERED
CUNNINGHAM
TO BE
INCLUDED
DURING THE
EARLY DAYS
OF THE
BERGAMASQUE
LAB.

UNNEC-
ESSARY.



NO,
YOUR
MAJ-
ESTY.

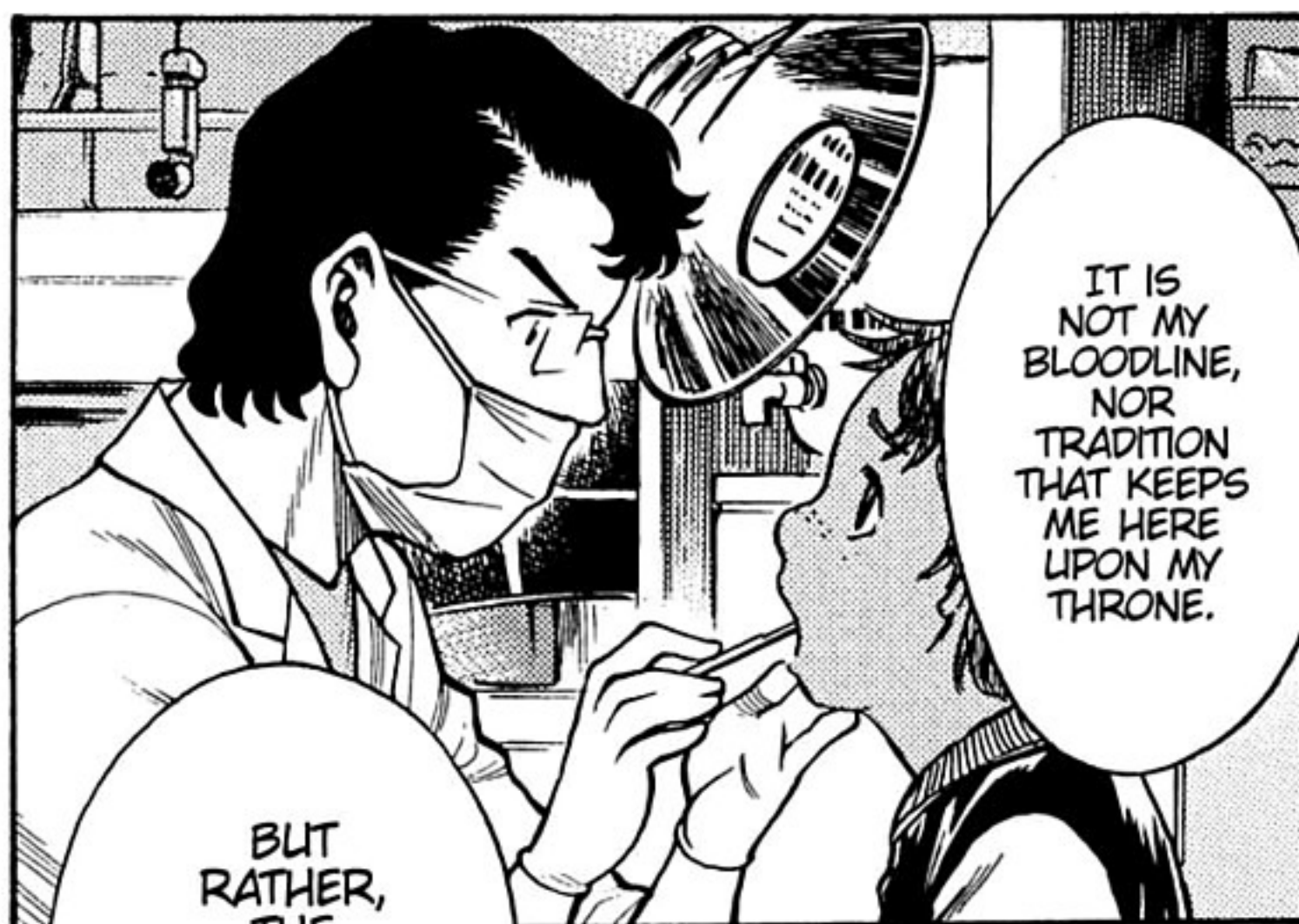
SPEAKING OF
RETAINERS,
THE "CLEANER"
WHO KILLED
CUNNINGHAM...

DO WE
KNOW YET
IF SHE
STILL
LIVES?



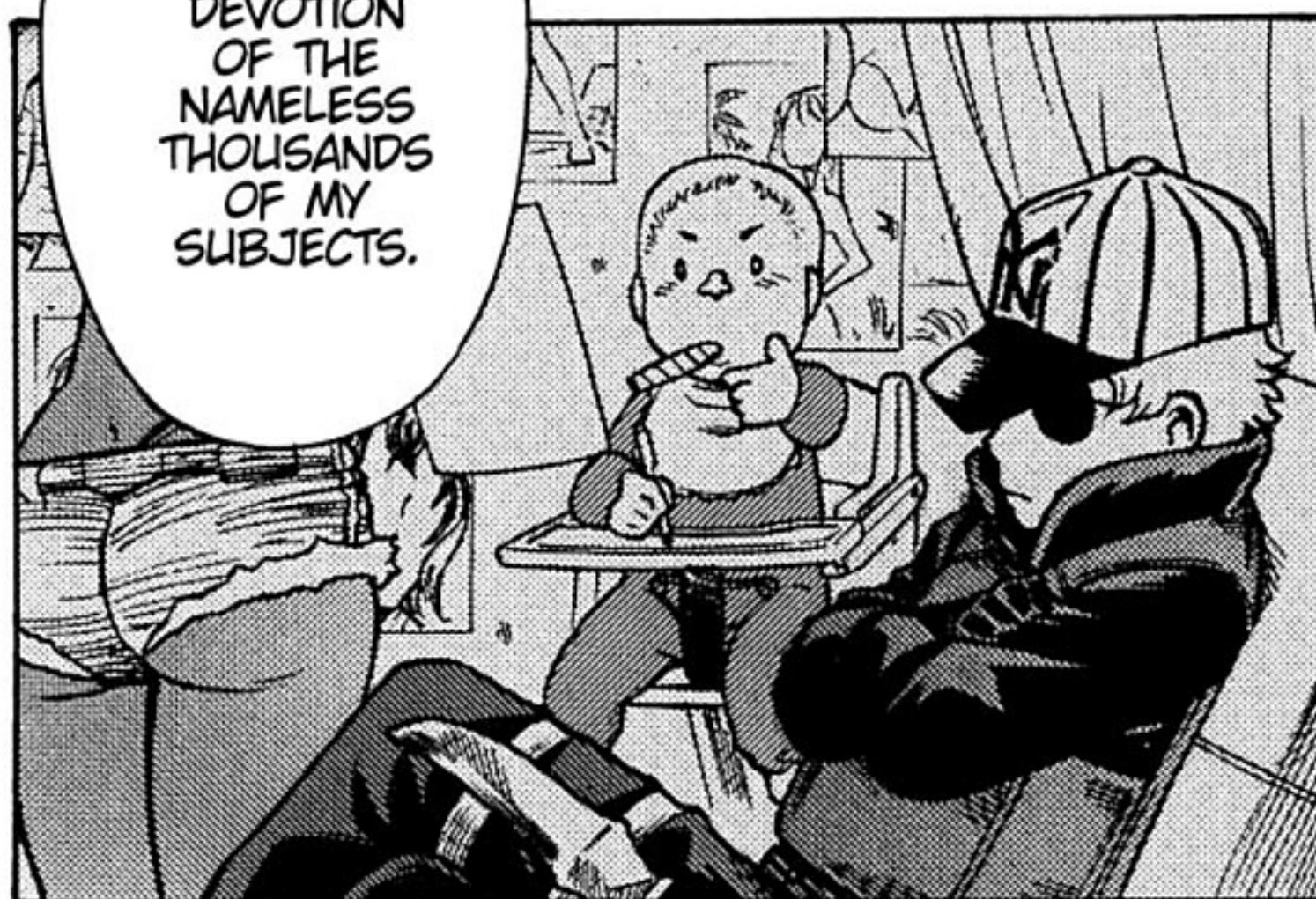
HIME-SAMA,
CUNNINGHAM'S
PUBLIC
MASTER IS
DUKE
BORGIANI.

MARQUIS
DERMAILLE
AND SEVERAL
OTHERS
HAVE...
SUGGESTED
THAT SOME
PUNISHMENT
MAY BE IN
ORDER.



IT IS
NOT MY
BLOODLINE,
NOR
TRADITION
THAT KEEPS
ME HERE
UPON MY
THRONE.

BUT
RATHER,
THE
DEVOTION
OF THE
NAMELESS
THOUSANDS
OF MY
SUBJECTS.



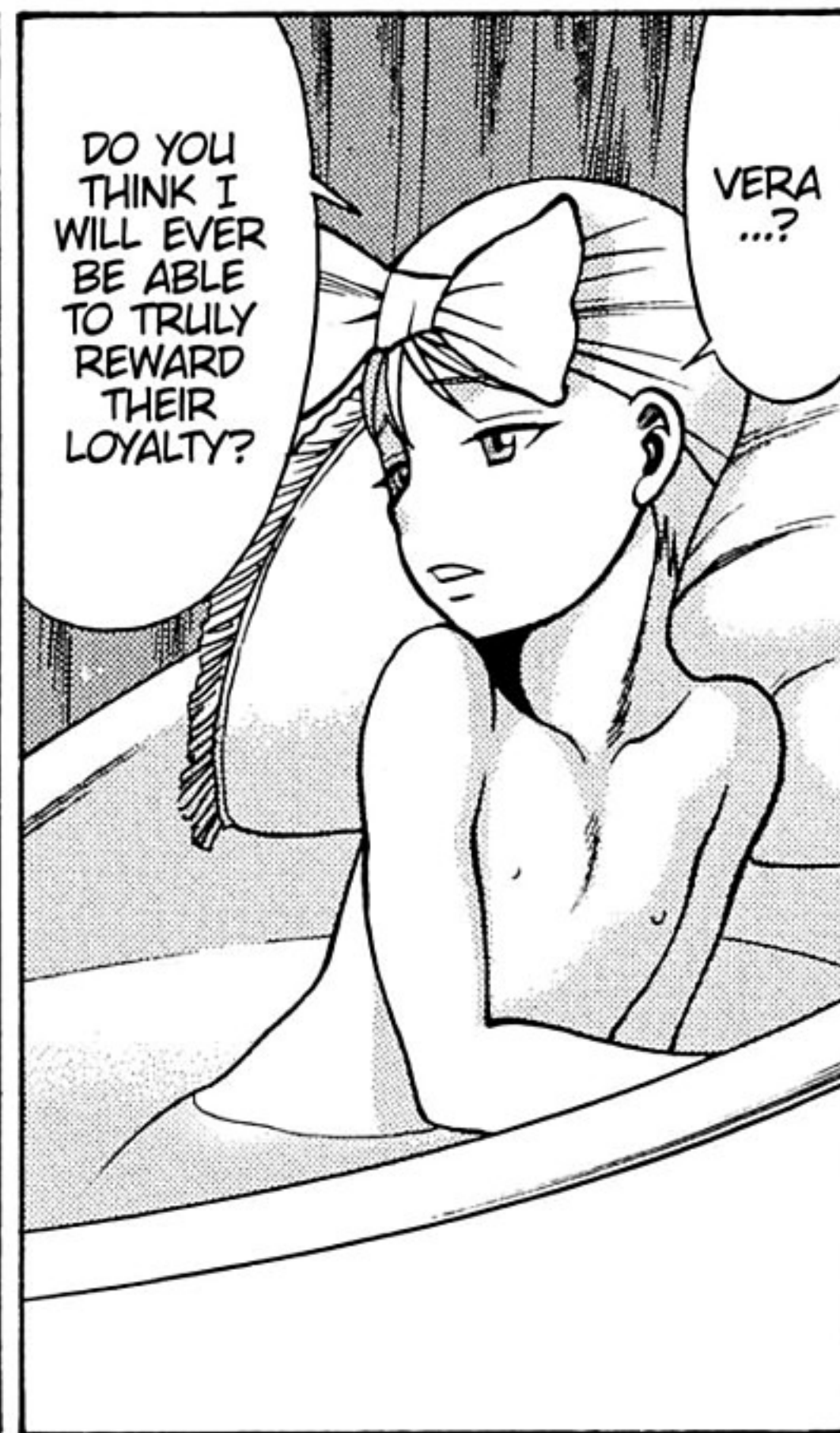
BUT AS
THE TIME
PASSES,
THERE IS
ONE THING
THAT I
LEARN WITH
GREATER
CLARITY
EVERY
YEAR.

CENTU-
RIES,
NOW.
FOR
CENTU-
RIES,
I HAVE
BEEN
CALLED
"QUEEN."



COME
BACK TO
ME, MY
FELLOW
VAMPIRE.

COME
HOME,
NAME-
LESS
ONE...



DO YOU
THINK I
WILL EVER
BE ABLE
TO TRULY
REWARD
THEIR
LOYALTY?

VERA
...?



YOUR
MAJESTY,
I HAVE
SEEN
MANY
HUMANS
AND MANY
VAMPIRES
IN MY
TIME.

I CAN
SAY WITH
CONFIDENCE
THAT
THERE IS
LITTLE
DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN
US.



WE DESIRE
THINGS,
AND WE
STRUGGLE
TO MAKE
MORE AND
MORE
OUR OWN.

BUT IF WE
EVER AIM TO
HAVE MORE
THAN WHAT
FITS IN OUR
TWO HANDS,
IT EVENTUALLY
TOPPLES
OVER AND
SMOTHERS
US BENEATH
ITS WEIGHT.



YOU
HAVE
ONE
HOME...

AND IT
IS HERE,
IN THE
LAND THAT
I RULE.
NOWHERE
ELSE.

THAT IS
THE
BURDEN
ALL LIVING
THINGS
BEAR...

EVEN IF WE
KNOW IT LEADS
TO NAUGHT
BUT OUR
DESTRUCTION,
WE MUST.

IT IS
OUR
STIGMA.

NO
DIFFERENT
FLESH

-END-

SPLSH

FRAULEIN
MEPHIS-
TOPHELES.

OR DE-
EVOLUTION
?

WHEN A
HUMAN
BECOMES A
VAMPIRE,
WOULD YOU
CALL THAT
EVOLUTION?

NEITHER,
DOCTOR
FAUST.

HUMANS.
VAMPIRES.
EVEN
BEASTS
AND
INSECTS...

NONE
CAN LIVE
WITHOUT
DESIRE.

Q. What did the skeleton say to the vampire?

A. You suck.

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

*HIME-SAMA OPENED A
TWITTER ACCOUNT...*

*...WHILE
SHE WAS
SUPPOSED
TO BE
WORKING.*

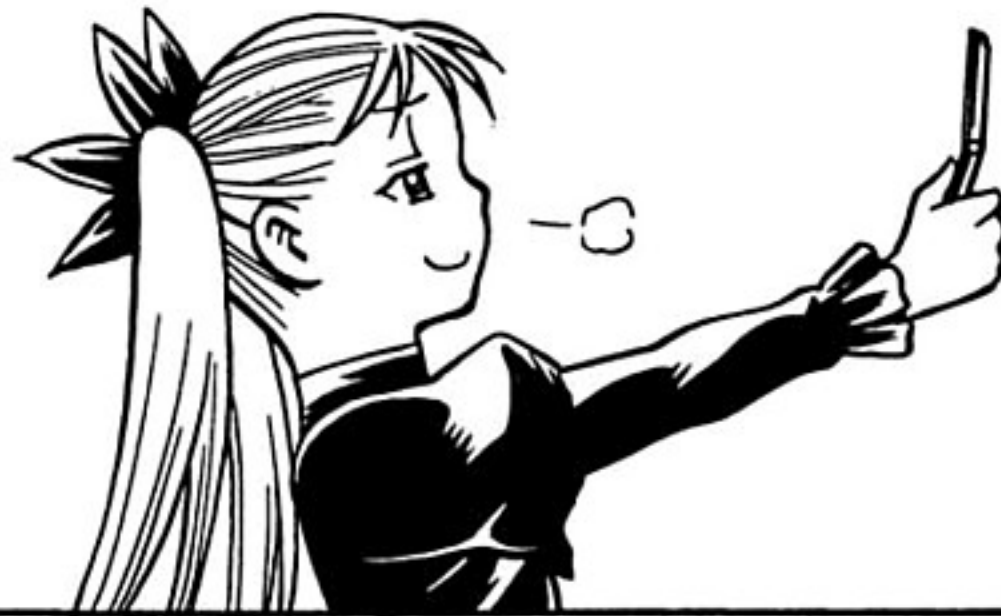


Mina Tepes @mina_tepes



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

I have opened an account on the service known as Twitter! All who have questions for me, speak them freely and I shall answer.



Rumpelstilzchen @小人の人

@mina_tepes Here we go again. Another fake Mina-hime. How many is this now?



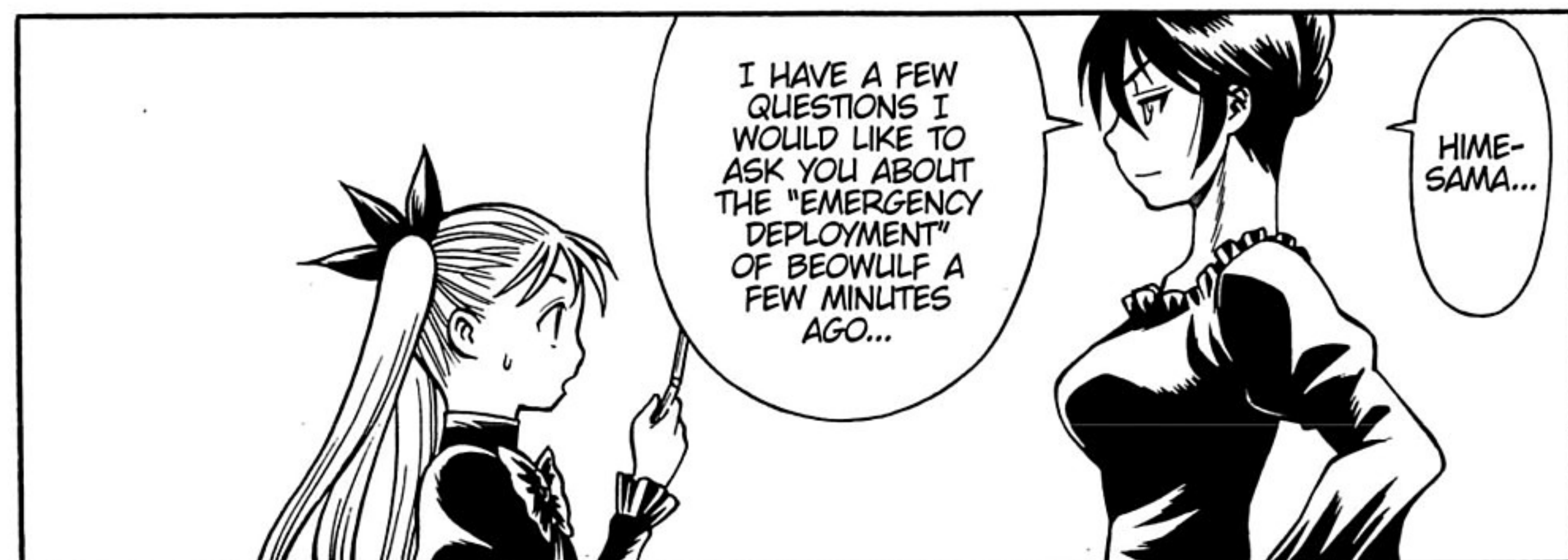
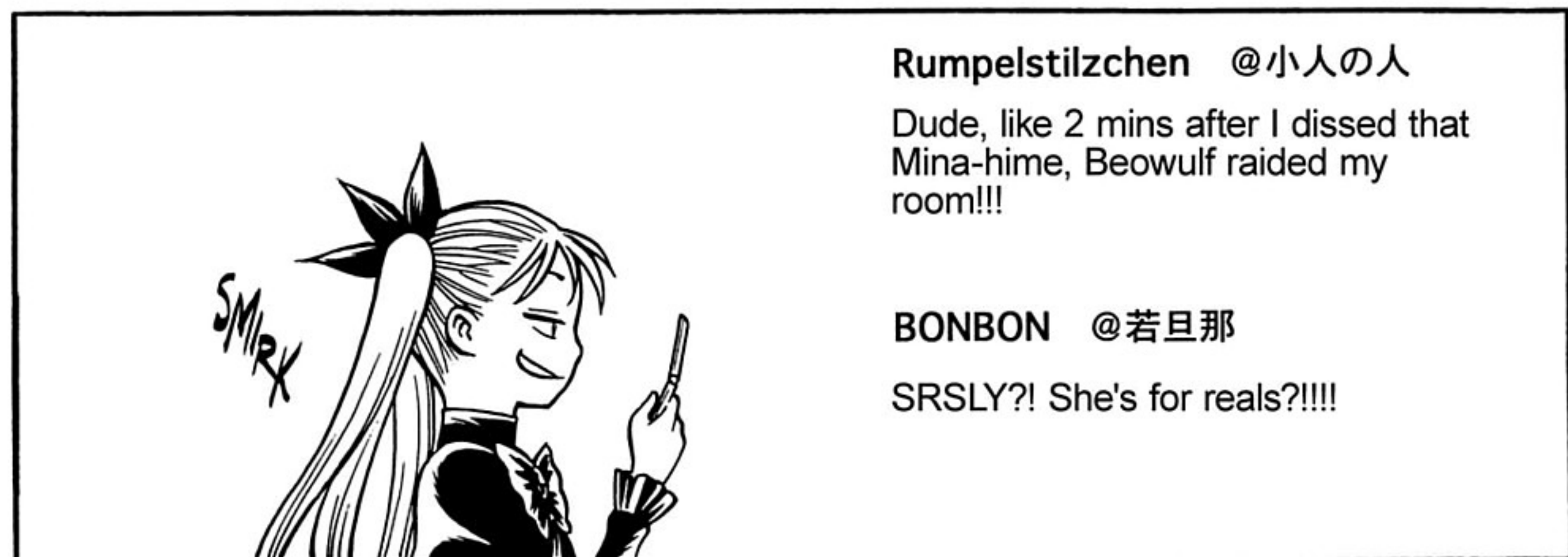
BONBON @若旦那

This 1 sounds a lot like her tho. Good copy!



Rumpelstilzchen @小人の人

Becha it's rly some old granny. LOL



鳥樹 鬼一郎 @TRICKY_STRANGE

mina hime-sama, do you have a favorite way to drink stigma?



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@TRICKY_STRANGE I find Stigma delicious in all ways. I enjoy it most when served naturally, with no additives.



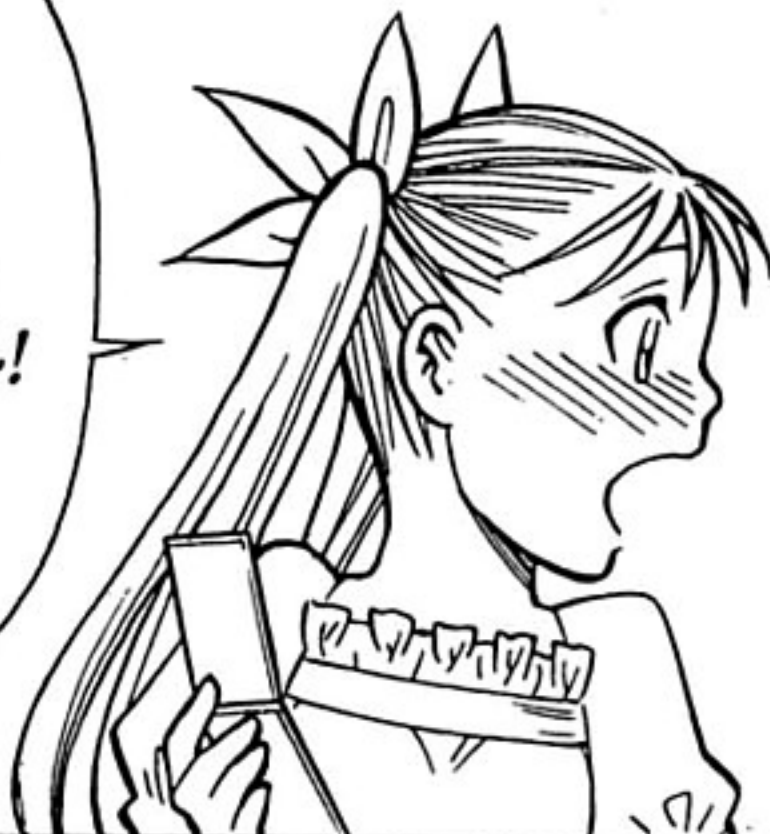
Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

However! On muggy summer days, cooling it to near freezing and making a slushy of it is a particular delight. Why, just the thought of it...



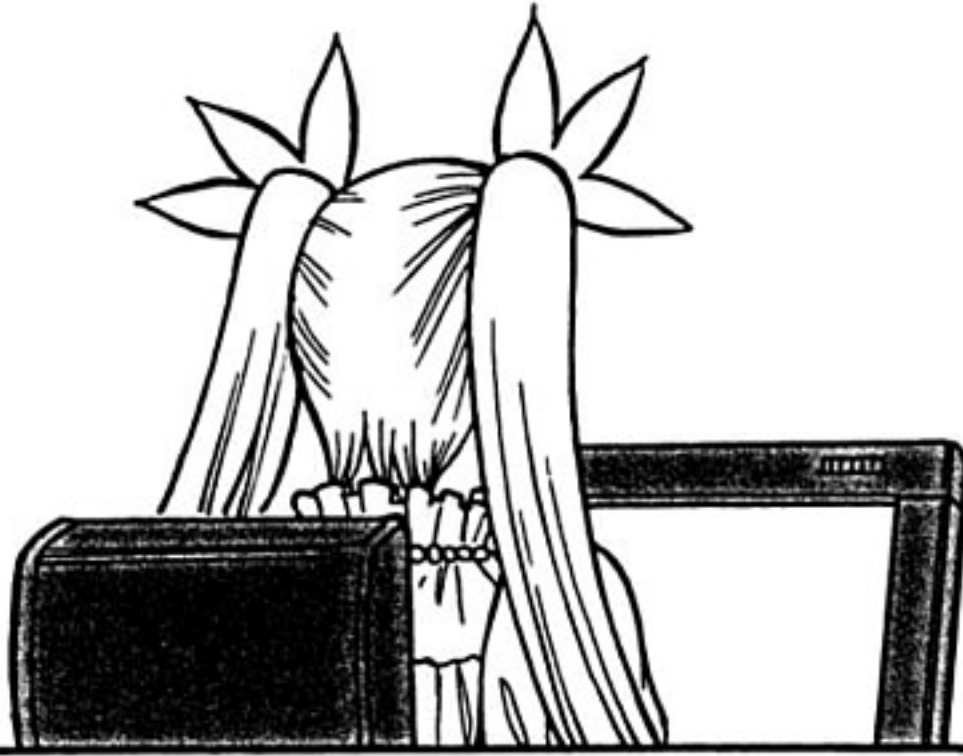
BRING
ME A
STIGMA
SLUSHY~!

NELLY
~!



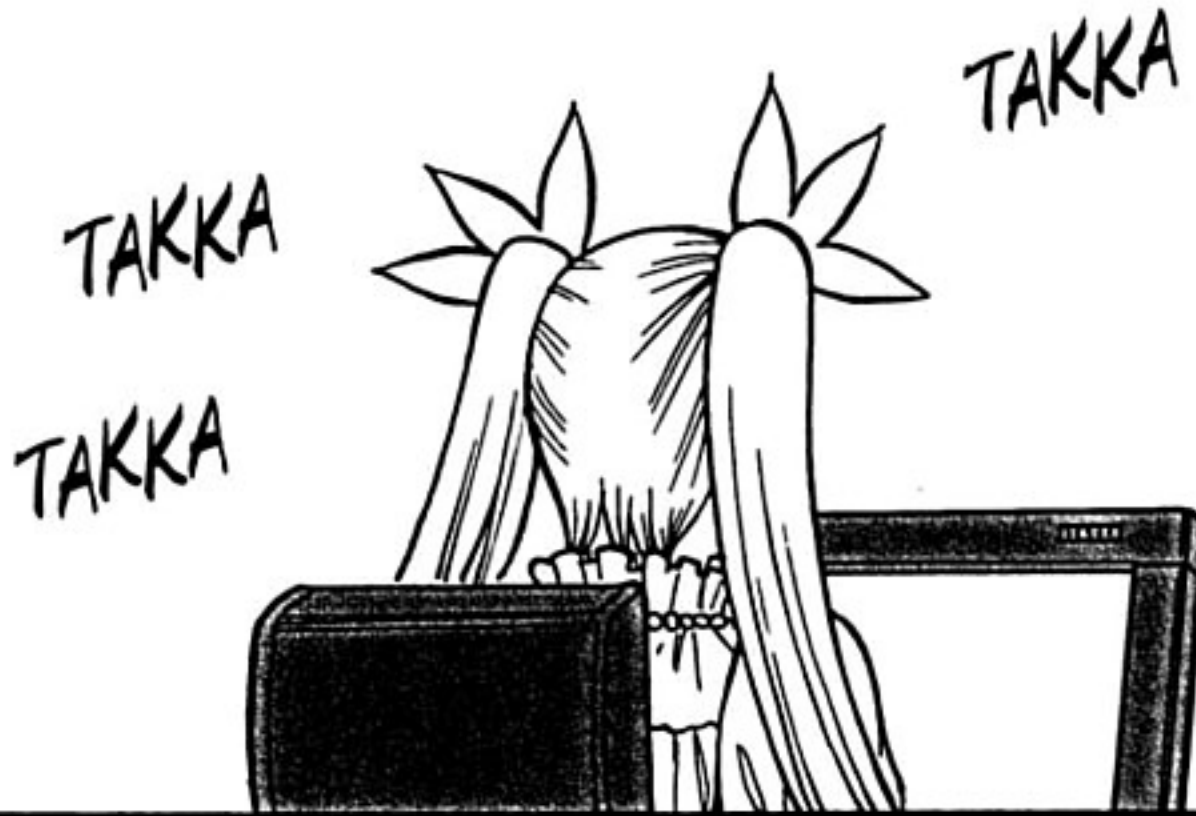
入江友人帳 @yirie_ro

I hear you've lived a very long time, Mina-hime, so I have a question. Was the development of the Nintendo Entertainment System a big shock to you?



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@yirie_ro Since Atari's PONG, I have paid close attention to the high-tech entertainment market. The NES system was an easy thing to predict.



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

But who could understand my surprise and joy at beholding the finalized product for the very first time?! No one!



TAKKA TAKKA TAKKA
TAKKA TAKKA TAKKA
TAKKA TAKKA TAKKA
TAKKA TAKKA TAKKA

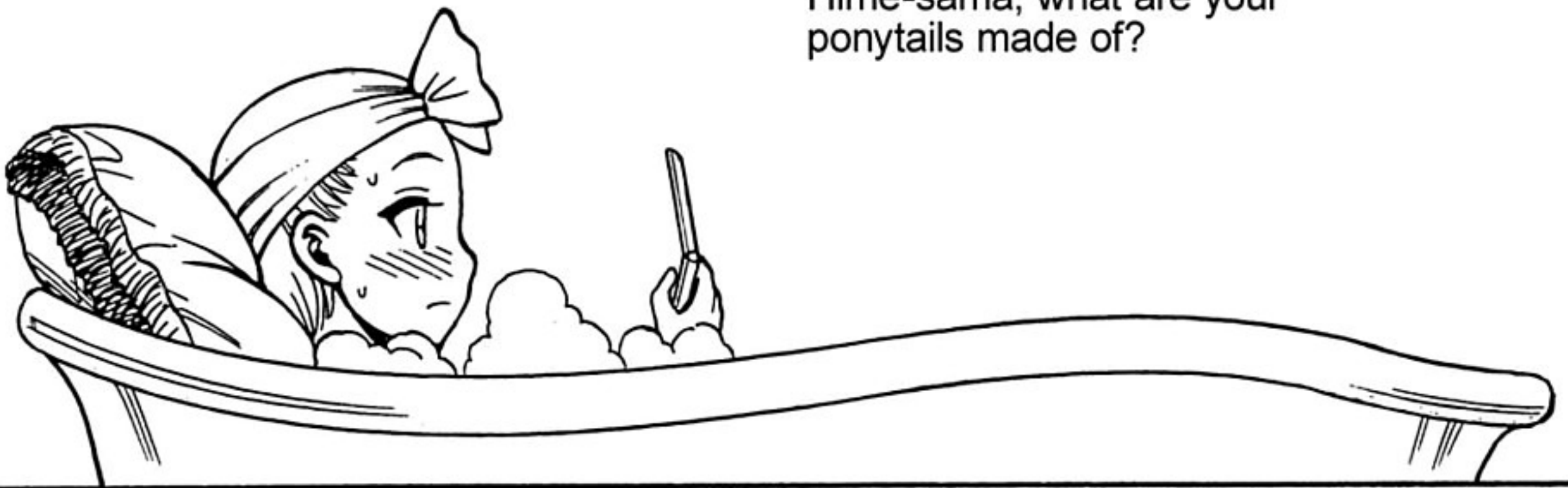
No more sneaking past Vera on nighttime escapes to an arcade, so that I could play Donkey Kong. Now I could beat him at my leisure, in my own room!!

DRAT!
TOO
MANY
CHARAC-
TERS....!



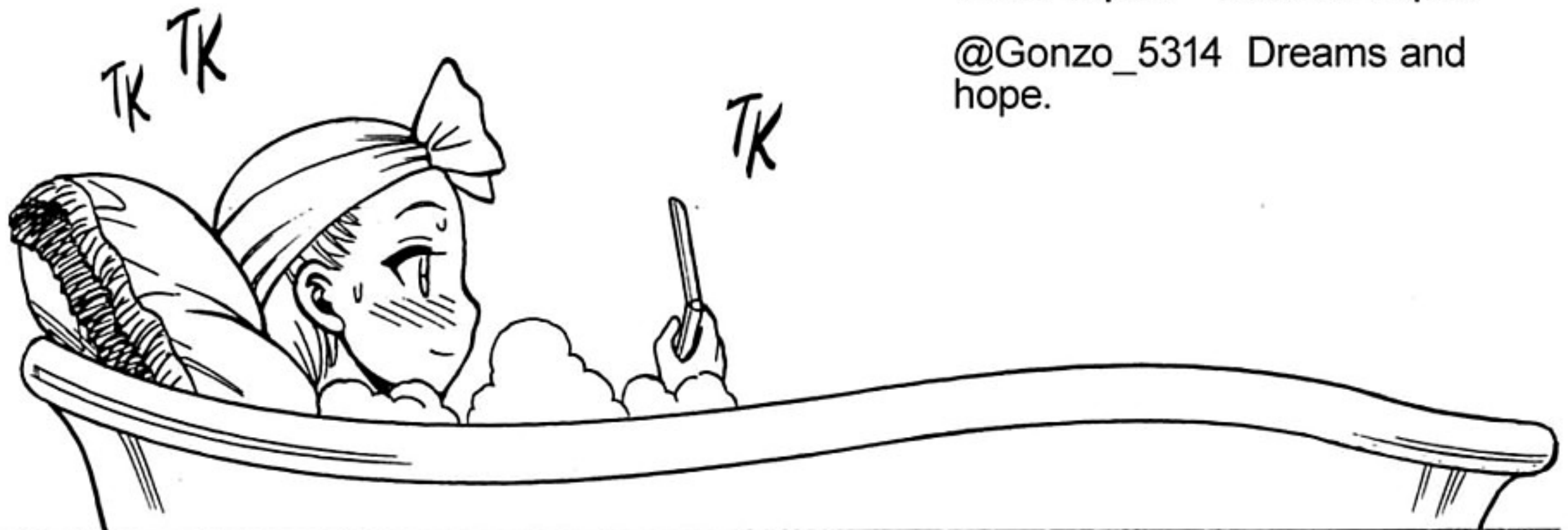
こんぞう @Gonzo_5314

Hime-sama, what are your
ponytails made of?



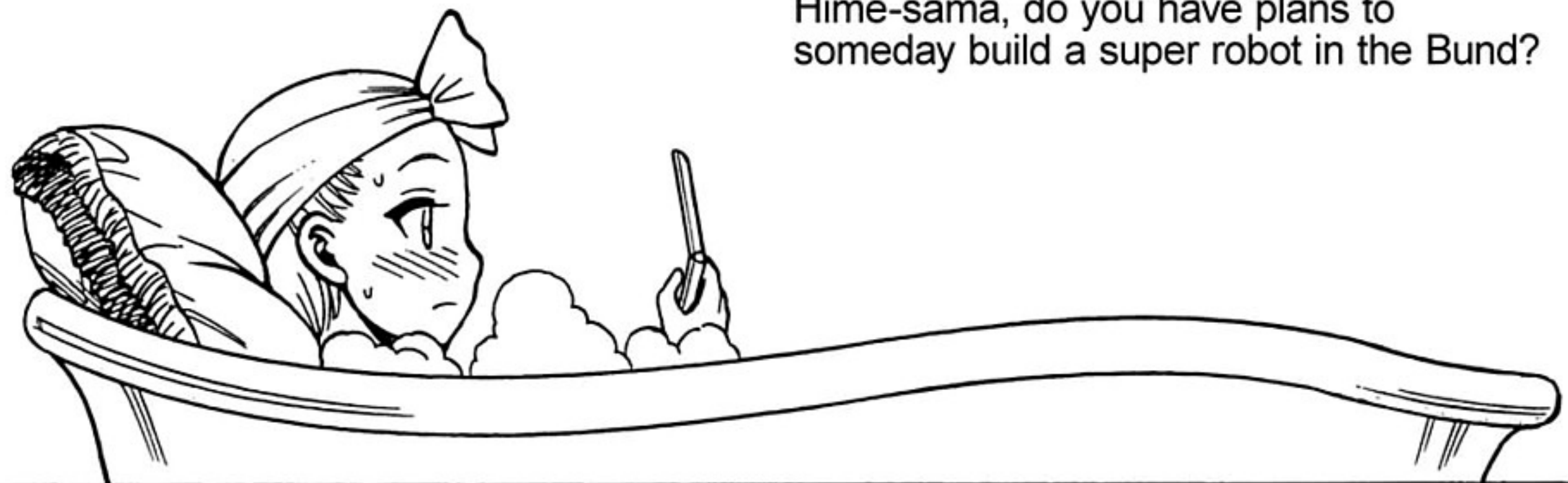
Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@Gonzo_5314 Dreams and
hope.



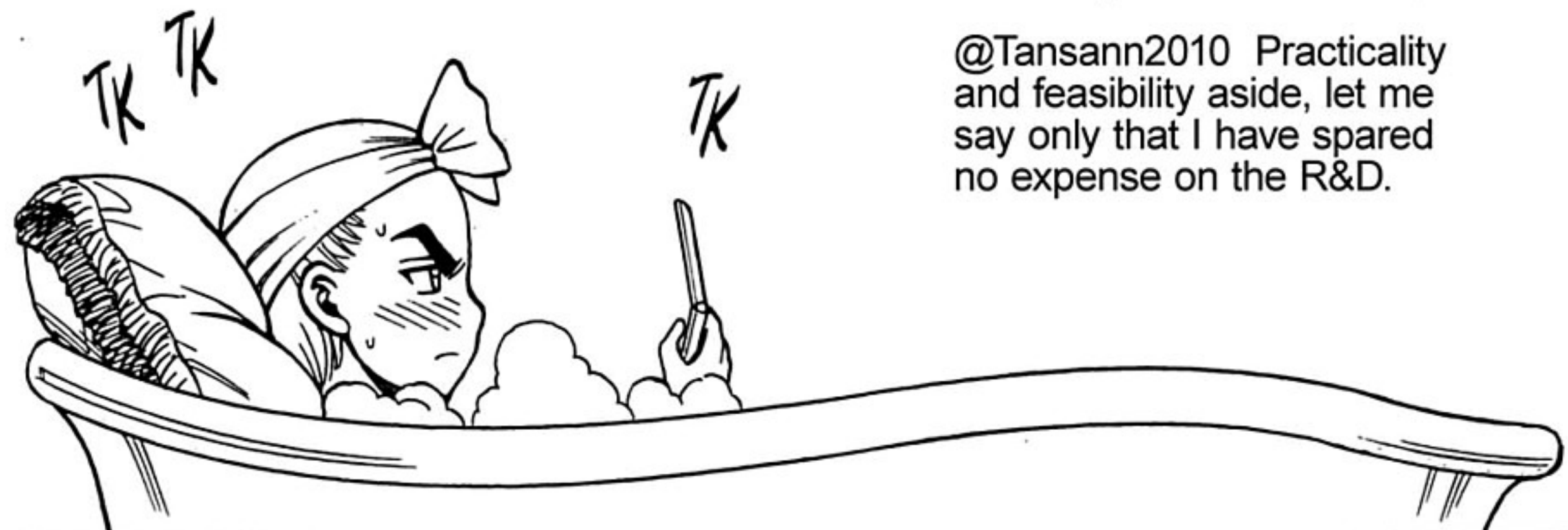
さはら@炭酸水愛好家 @Tansann2010

Hime-sama, do you have plans to
someday build a super robot in the Bund?



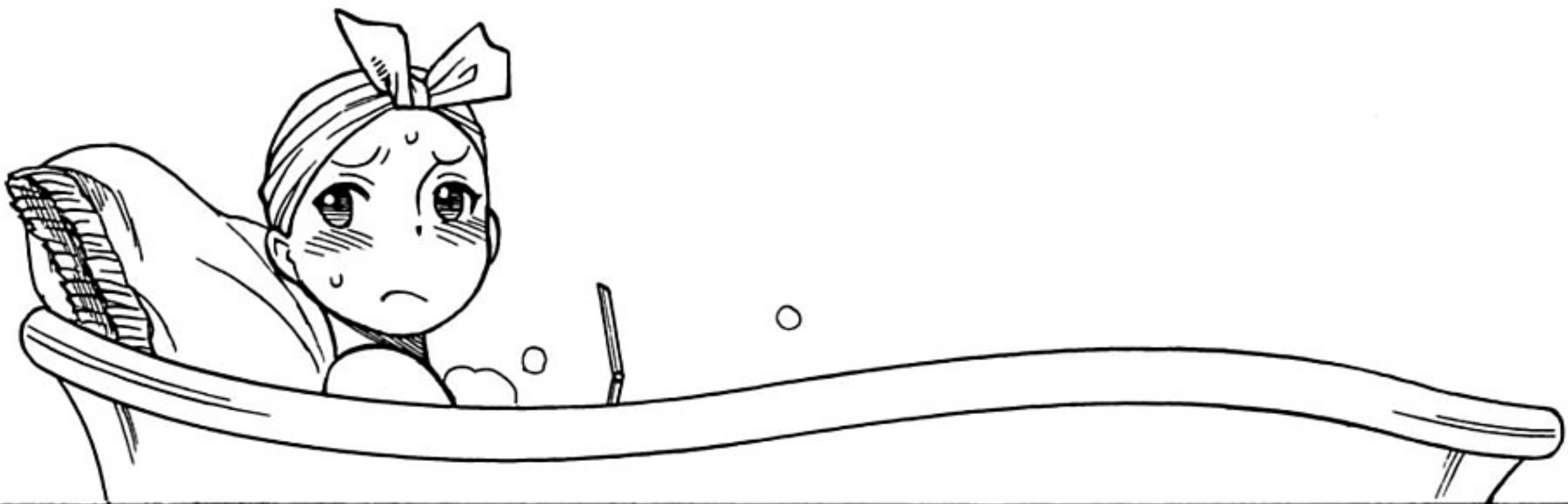
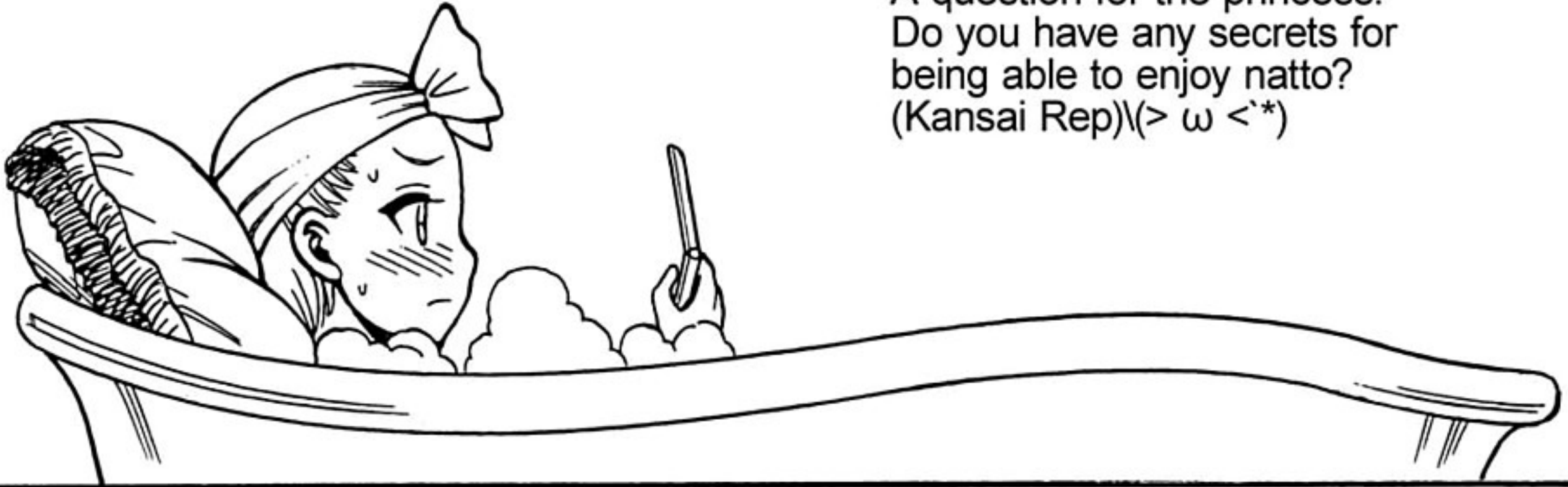
Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@Tansann2010 Practicality
and feasibility aside, let me
say only that I have spared
no expense on the R&D.



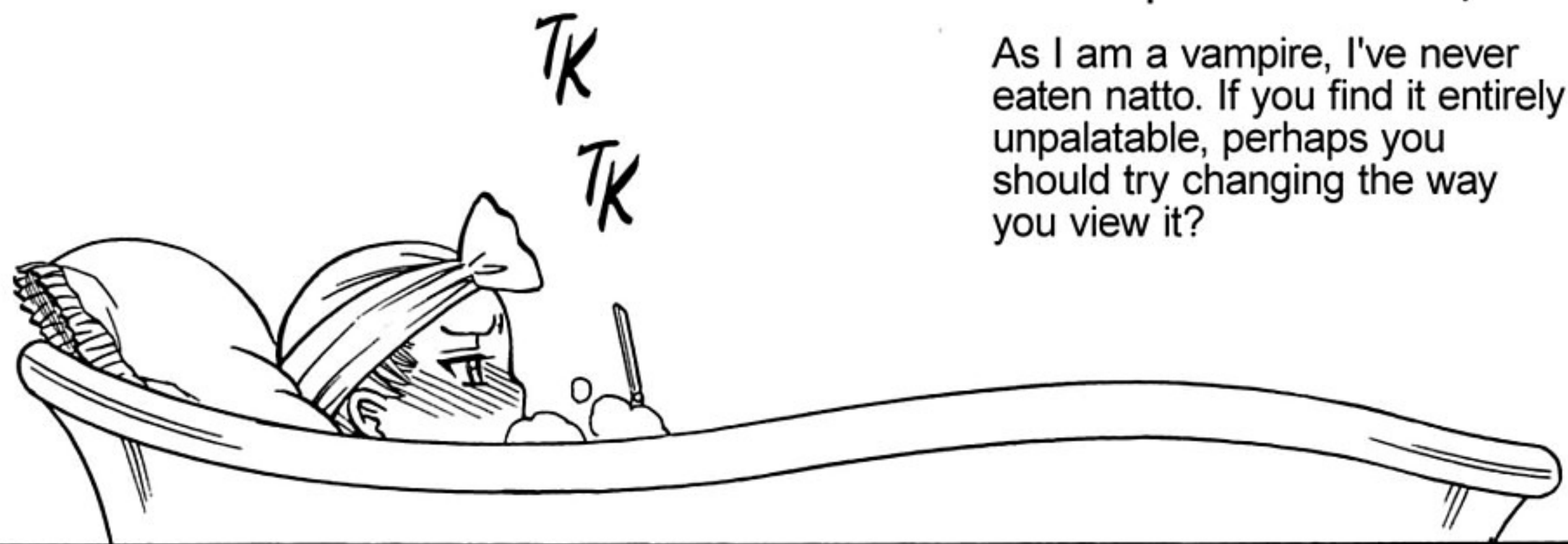
こてぱんち @kotepunch

A question for the princess!
Do you have any secrets for
being able to enjoy natto?
(Kansai Rep)\(> ω <*)



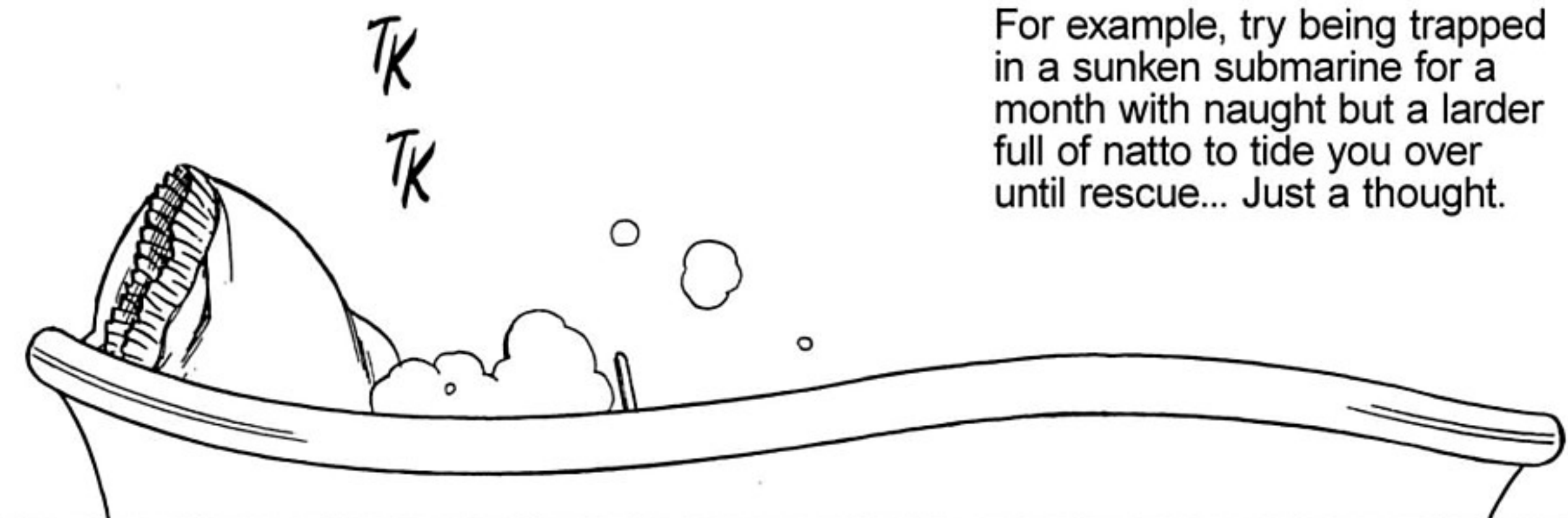
Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

As I am a vampire, I've never
eaten natto. If you find it entirely
unpalatable, perhaps you
should try changing the way
you view it?



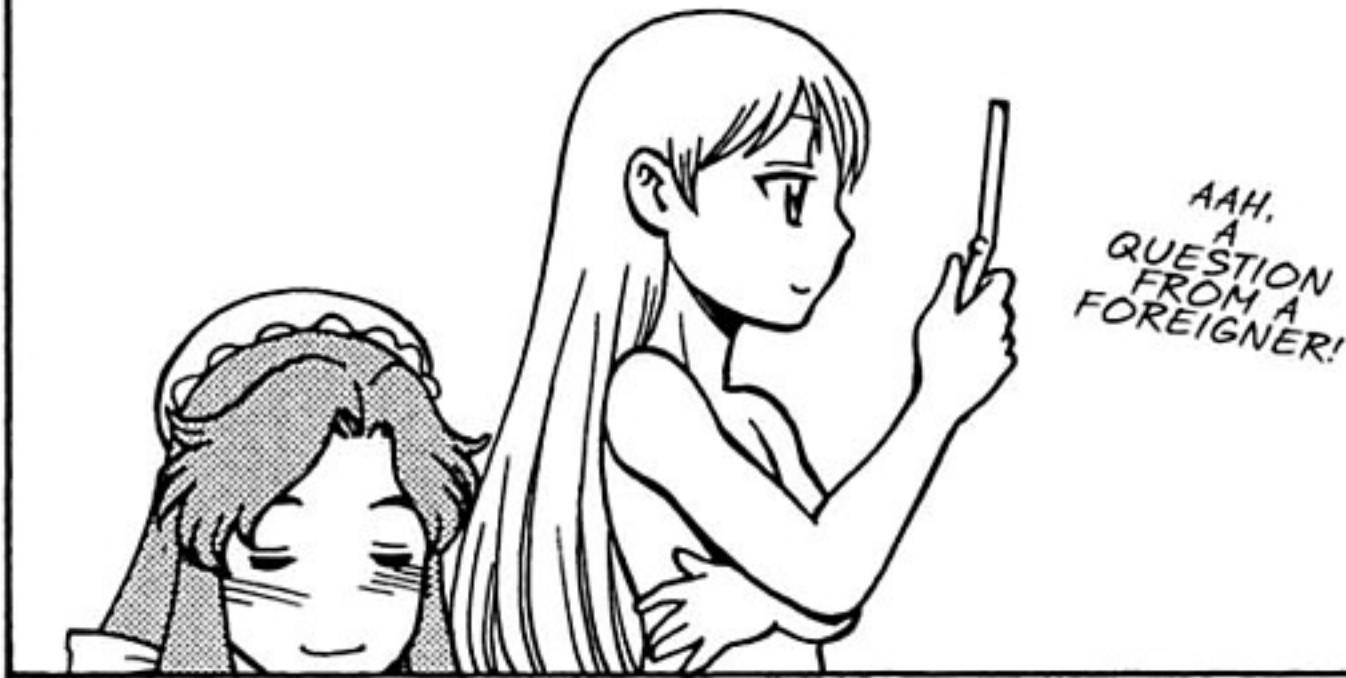
Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

For example, try being trapped
in a sunken submarine for a
month with naught but a larder
full of natto to tide you over
until rescue... Just a thought.



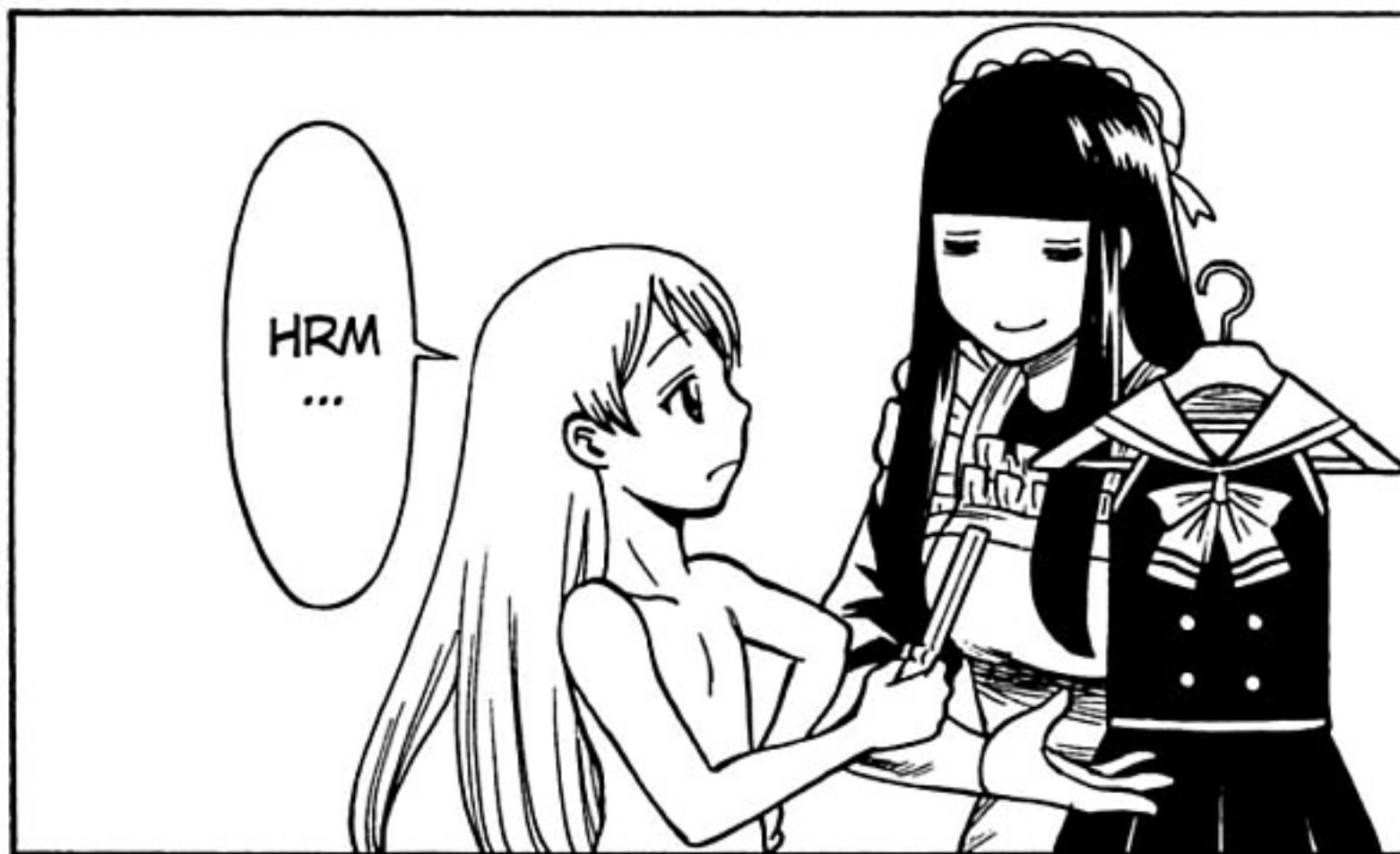
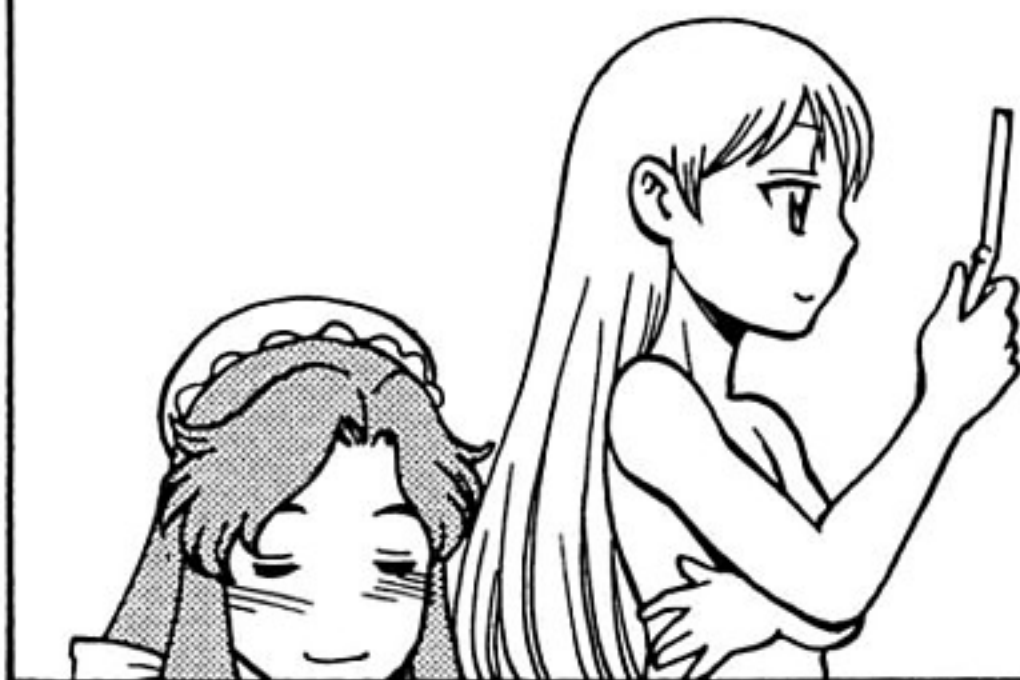
高野 聖 @highlander_tk

(◊◊)/<Q. Hime-sama,
what is your favorite
fashion brand or designer?

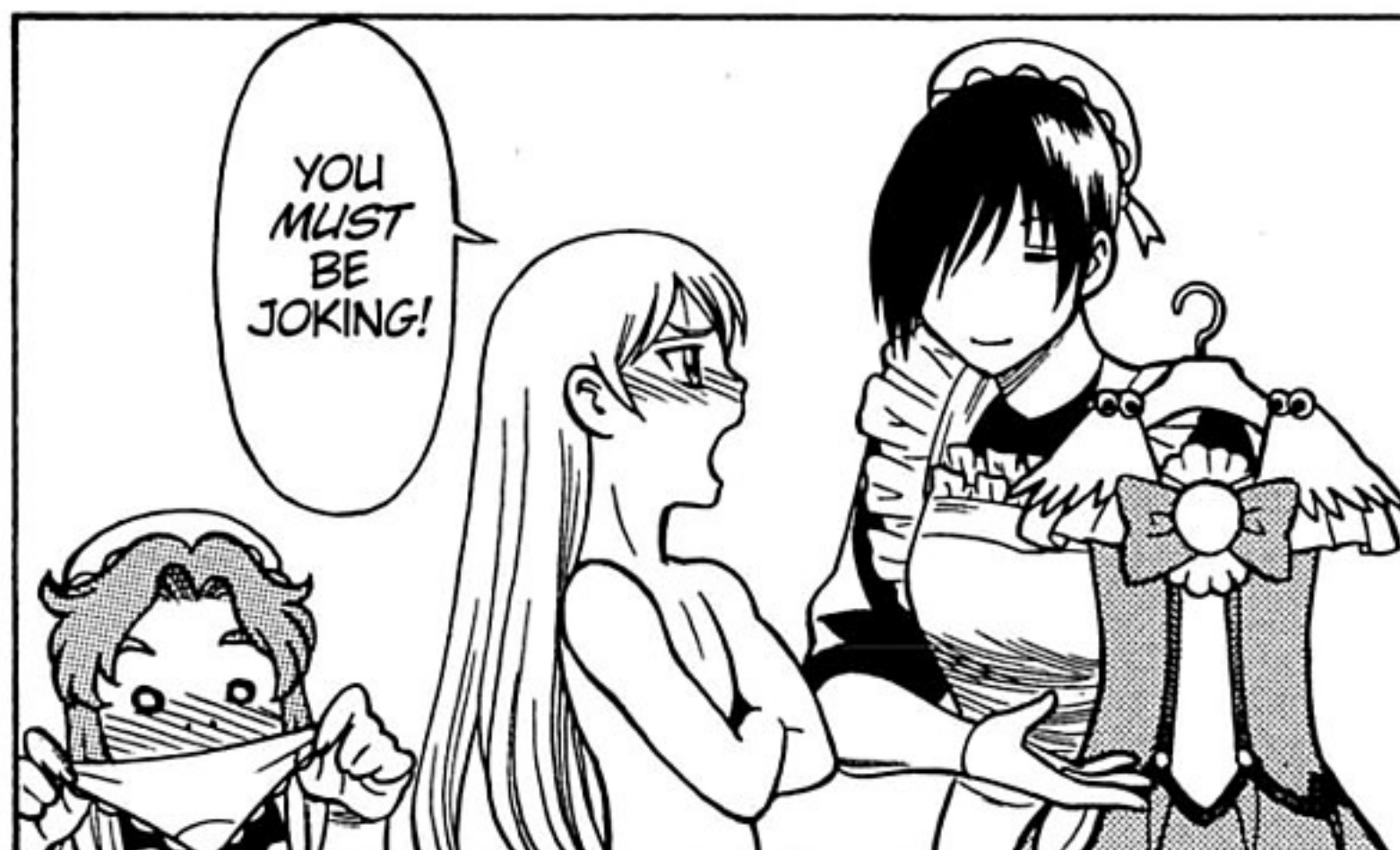


Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@highlander_tk House Tepes
has employed a personal tailor
since my mother's days. All of
my clothing is sewn by him.



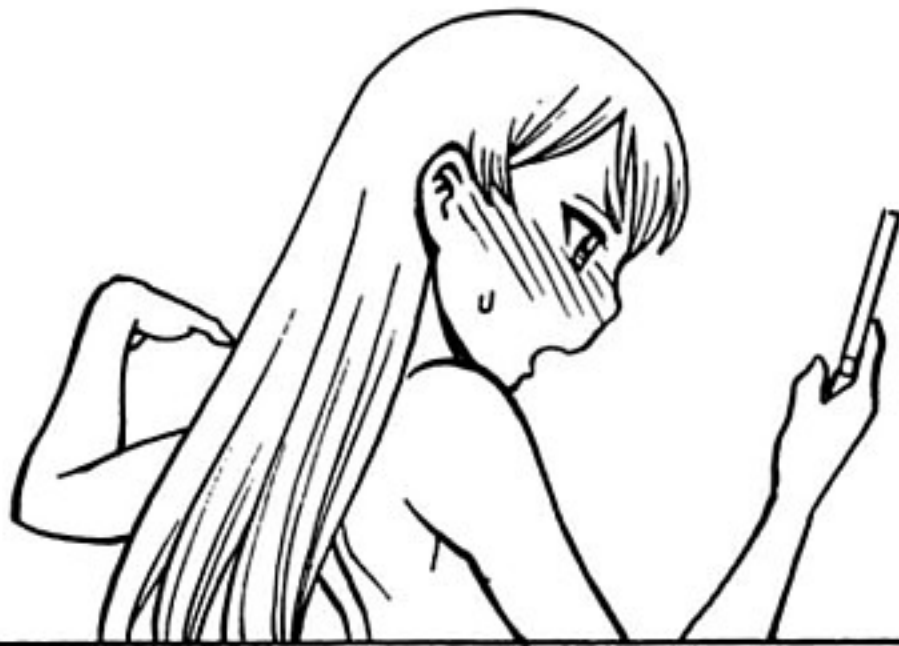
Though over 400 years old,
he diligently studies the current
trends, and always provides
me with outfits appropriate
to the era...



To varying degrees at times.

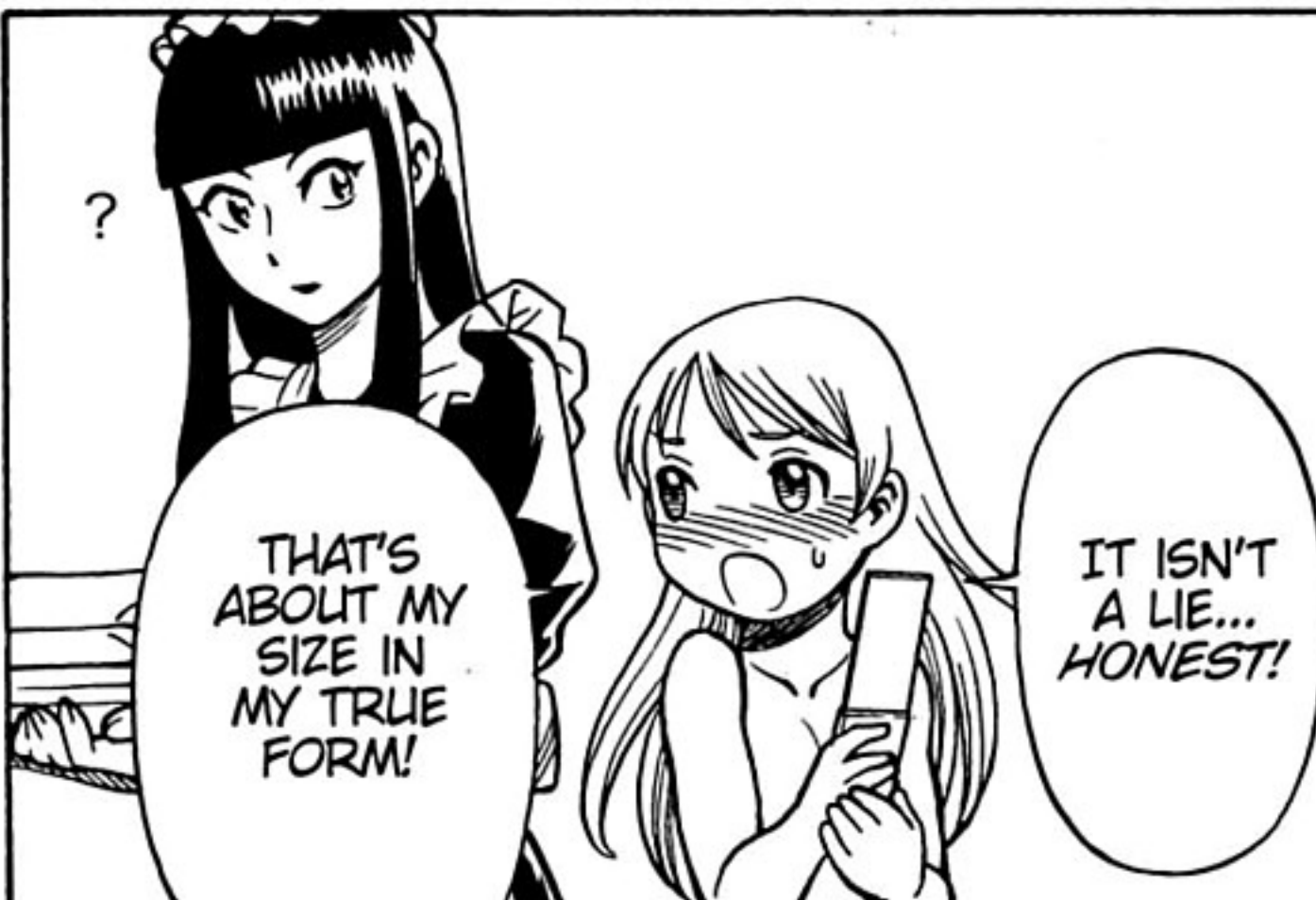
ひとみん@nakanishihitomi @hitomin48

What're your 3 sizes? If you could gimme
your bra size 2, that'd be gr8!



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

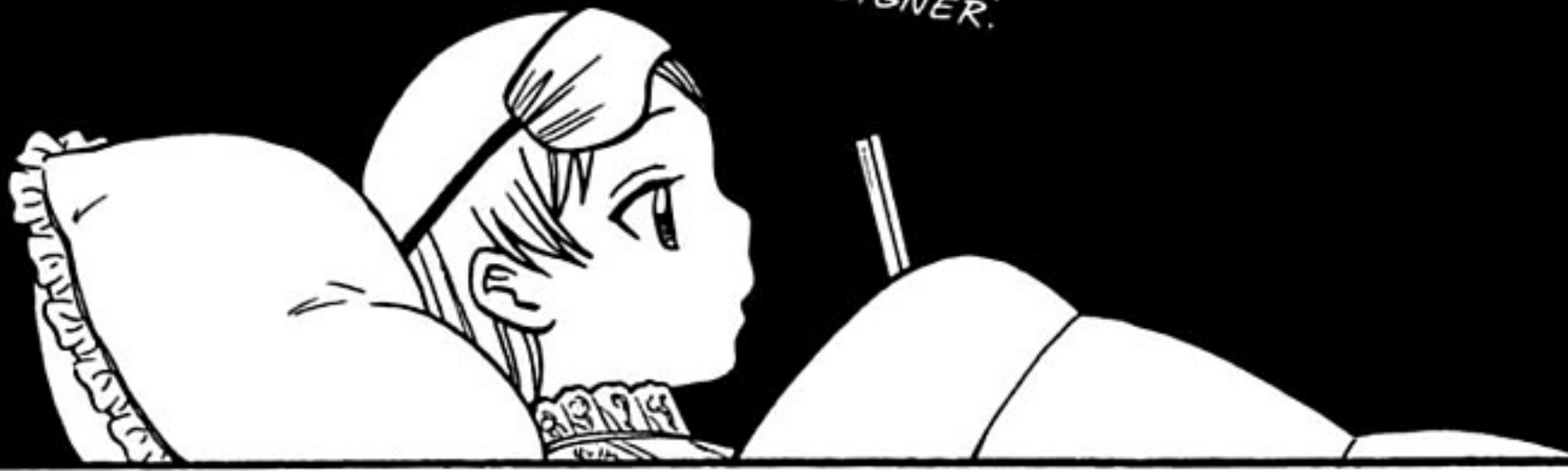
@hitomin48 B95, W63, H90.



Patrick @mrcreepingdeath

to Mina "what style or game of music suits your fancy?"

AH! HOW
UNUSUAL.
ANOTHER
ONE FROM A
FOREIGNER.



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@mrcreepingdeath I like music of all genres.

But I was surprised by the evolution and diversification of rock music after the British Invasion.

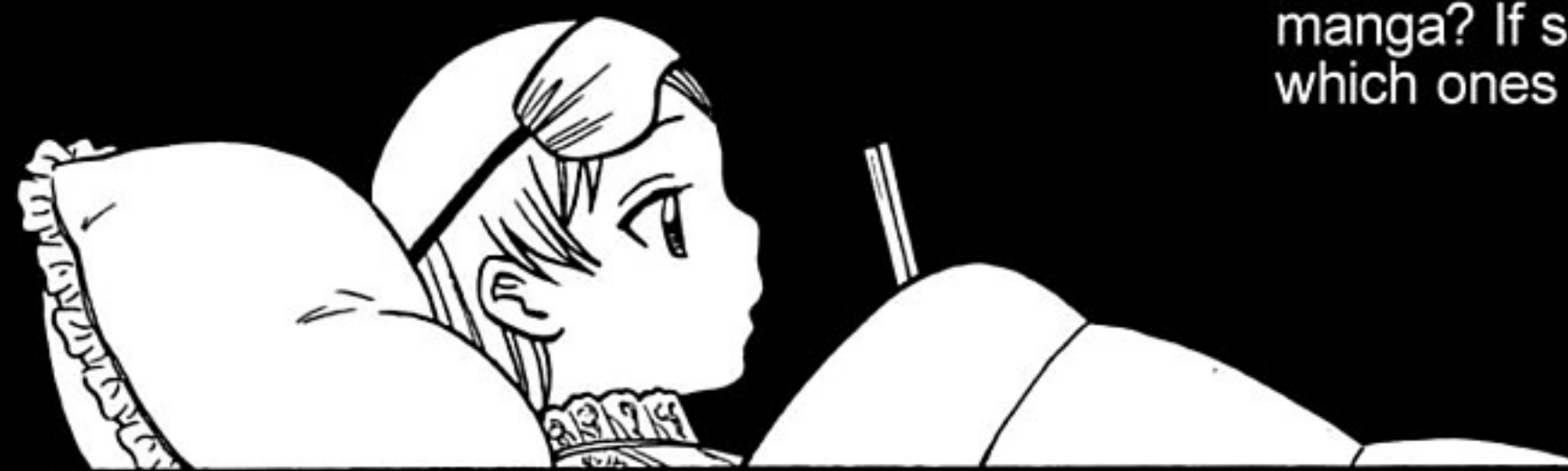
The song that I incidentally love the most is "Sympathy for the Devil."

TK
TK
TK
TK



matsu @matsu009

A question for Your Majesty. Japan is known for its unique culture of "manga." Has Your Majesty read any manga? If so, may I ask which ones you like?

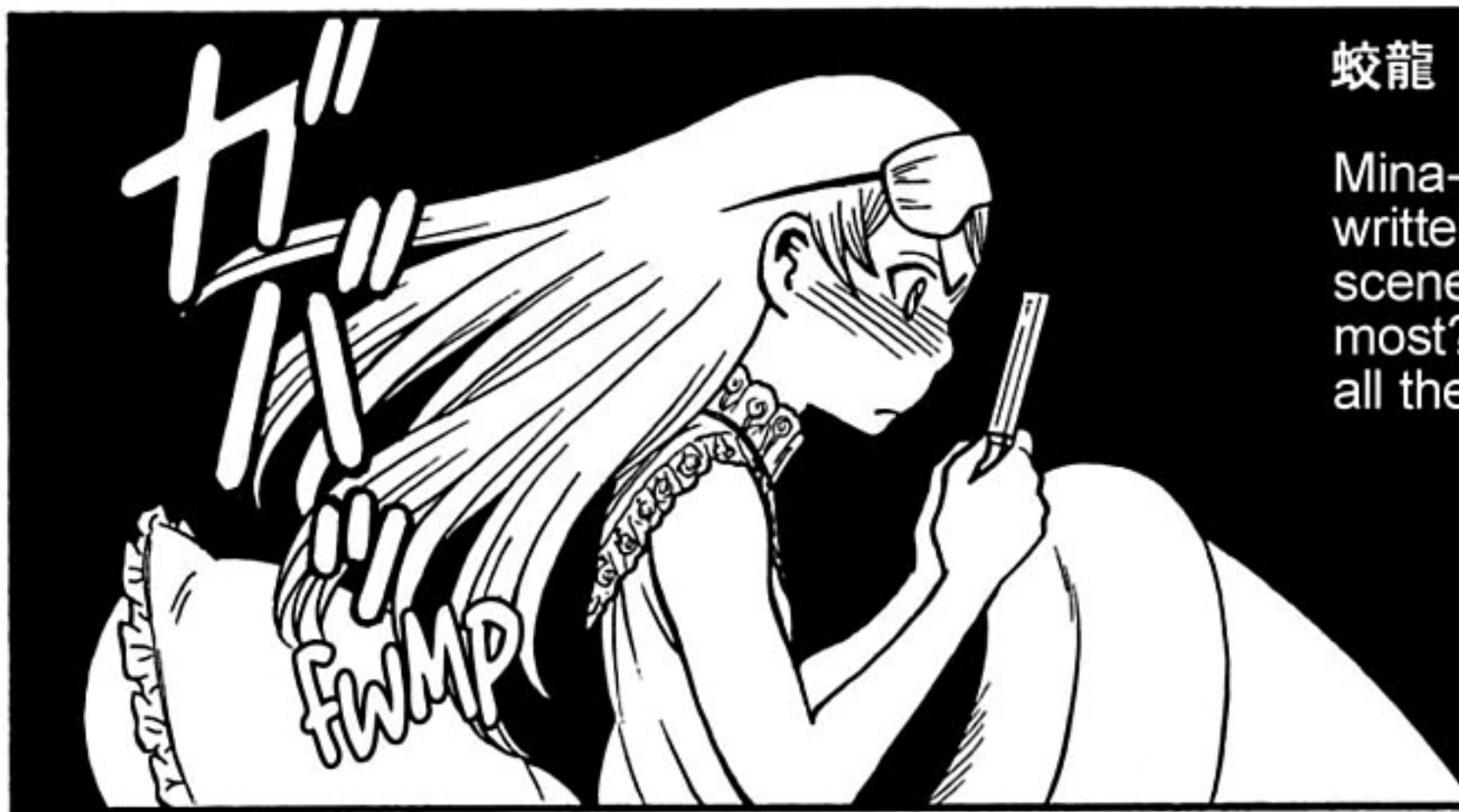


Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@matsu009 My favorite is "Showa Genroku Rakugo Shinchu." The charm of the teacher, who is the embodiment of a dying art, could make a girl swoon.

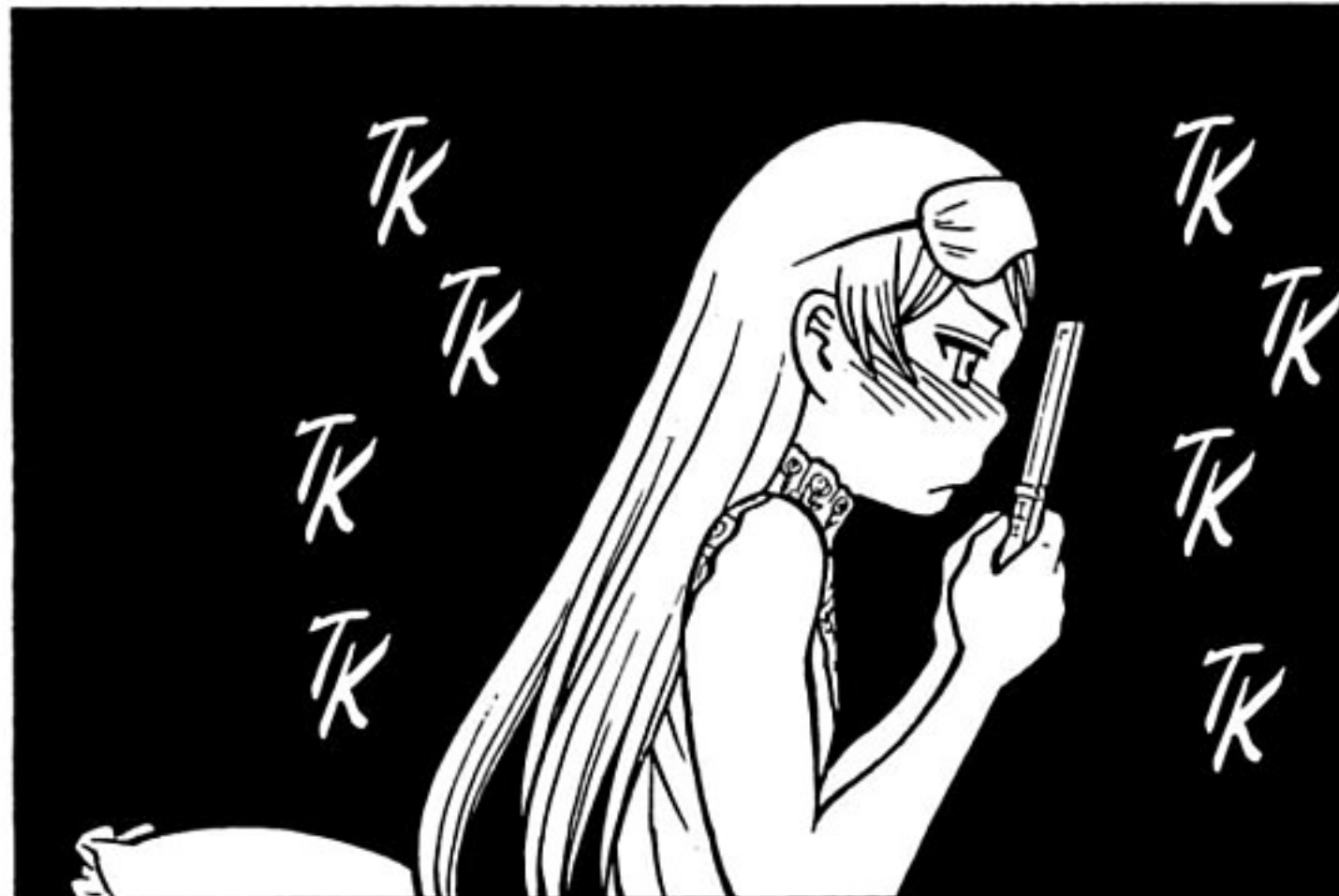
TK
TK
TK
TK





蛟龍 @kouryuu

Mina-hime, of all the doujin written by Yuki, which scene excited you the most? Please tell me all the details!



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@kouryuu Every work by my illustrious friend Yuki is a masterpiece. In a world where "truth" is becoming increasingly vague, this is one absolute... (cont)

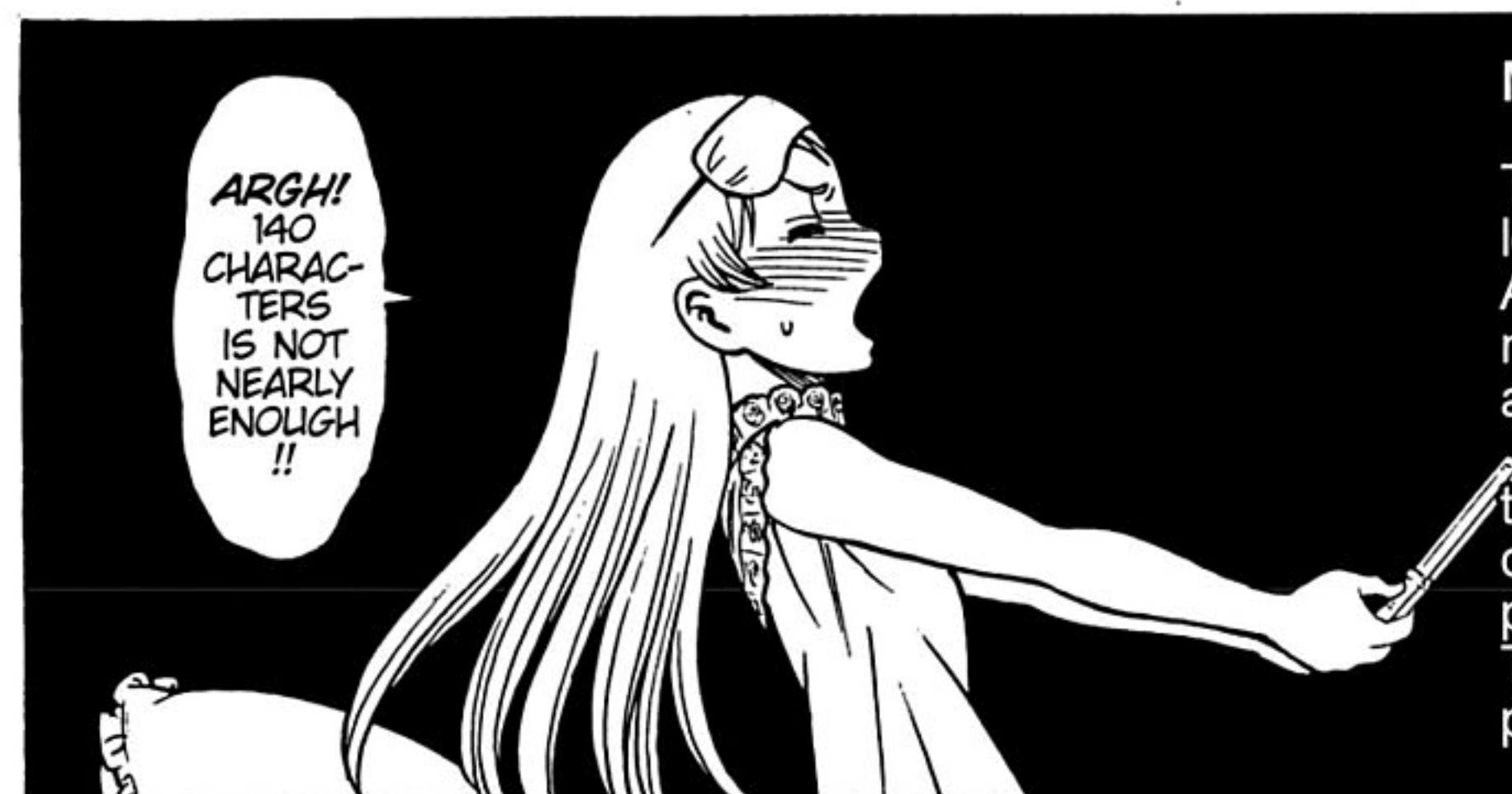
and undeniable fact. If I must assign ranks to those perfect gems of literature, the top spot goes without question to "Werewolf Akira"... (cont)



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

Especially once Akira's split personality is introduced, and he begins to toy with his rival, Ryohei. The plot can be called nothing short of divine! (cont)

The more emphasized the uber-seme "tomboy" side becomes, the more the original uke-only personality gains a deepening layer of masochism... (cont)



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

The sheer elegance of it all leaves me shuddering with joy! A more personal reason for my love of this story (and I will admit, I brag), during... (cont)

the creation of the "tomboy" character, Yuki based her personality on my very own! That I cannot ignore. Yuki's perceptiveness is beyond...

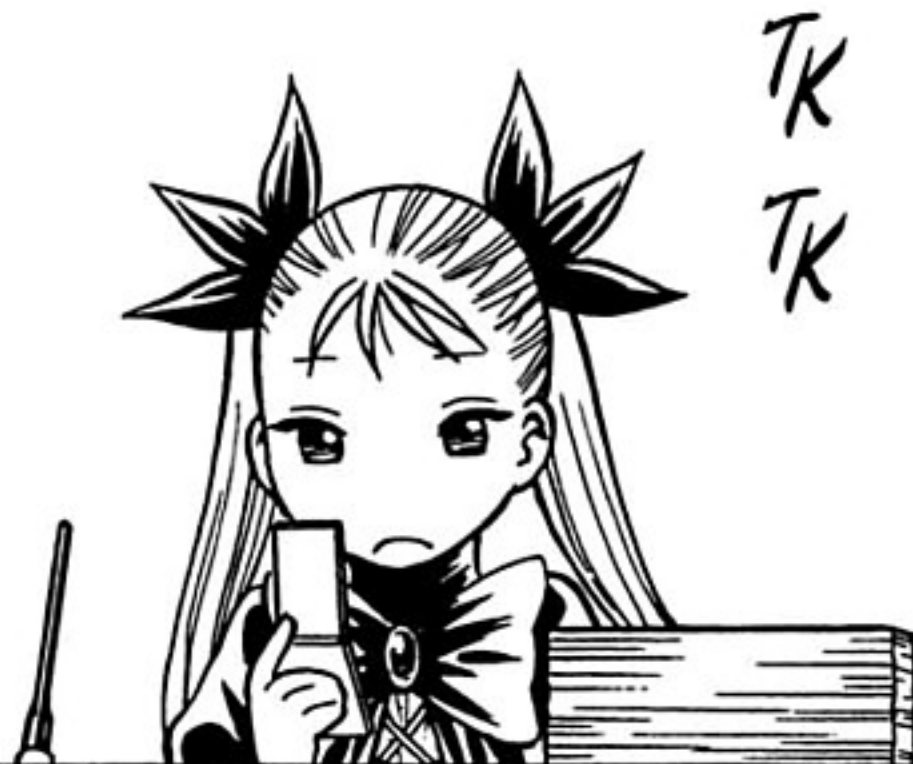
サディアナ @sadhiana

When becoming a vampire,
does a more elite biter translate
into higher status for the bitten?



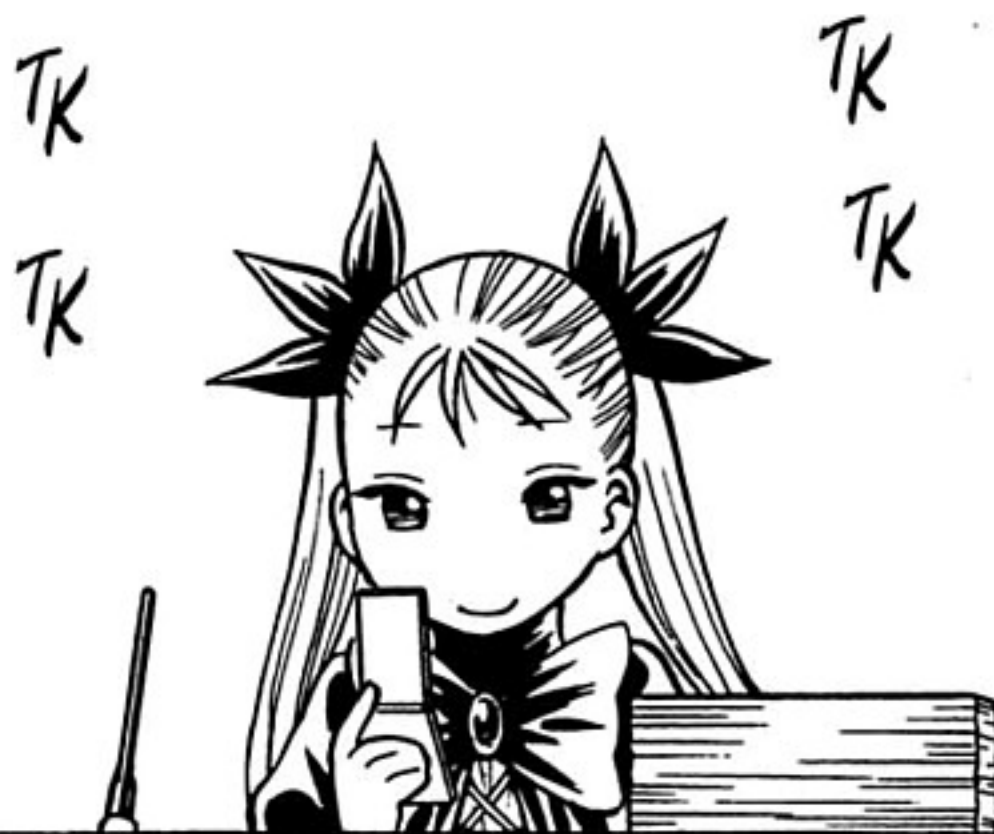
Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@sadhiana Yes. While the hierar-
chy of vampire society is absolute,
that does not mean that all
are immobile within it.

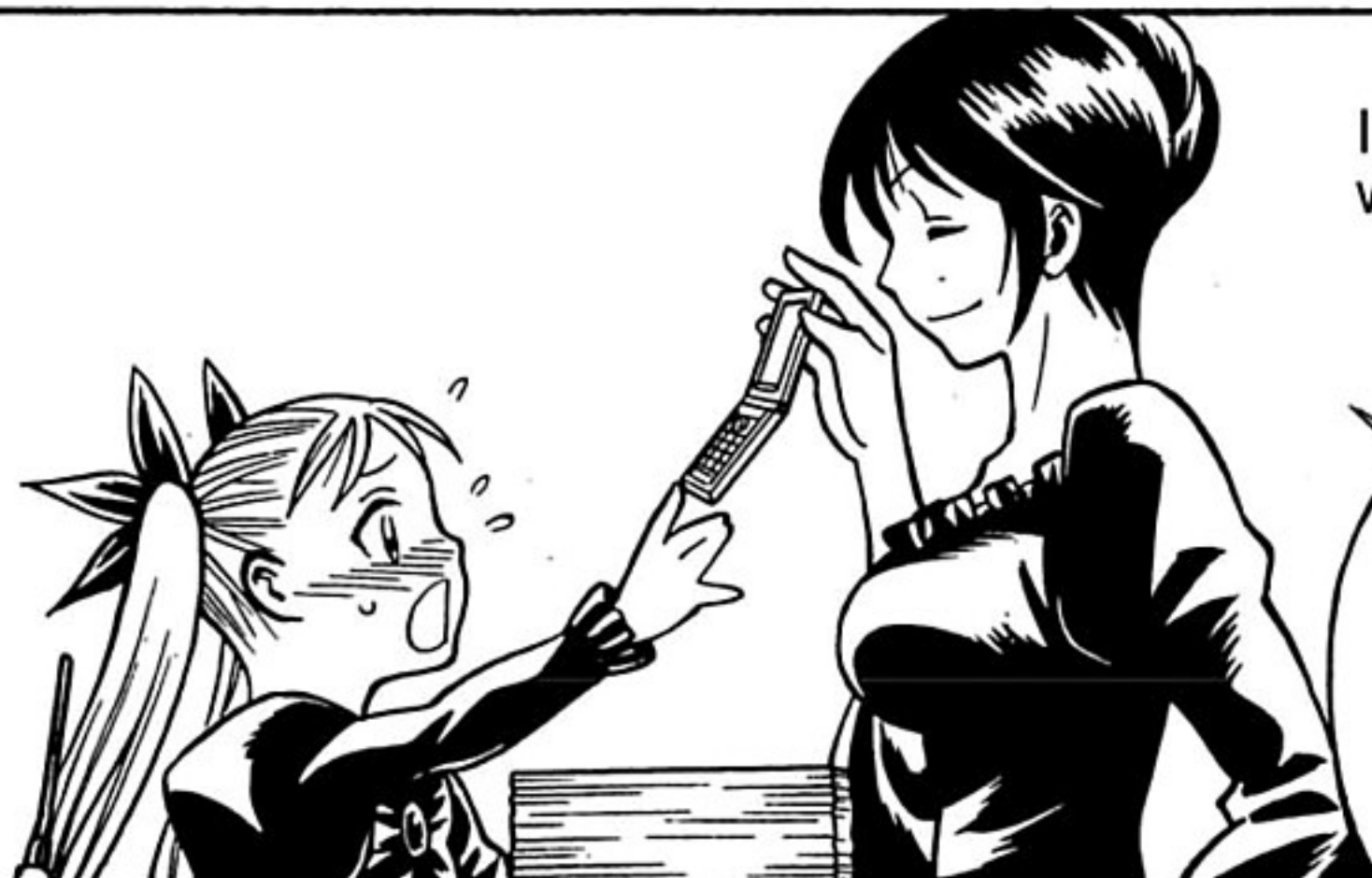


Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

My trusted retainer Vera was
once human, but she made
the Blood Pact directly with my
mother. Now she has rank
equal to that of even old nobility.



In fact, on occasion she
will even go so far as to...



HIME-SAMA,
IT IS
TIME YOU
SHOULD BE
WORKING!



大渡 鴉 @oowatarikarasu

Mina-hime, who do you love the most?



Mina Tepes @mina_tepes

@oowatarikarasu

That is a secret.

ACTUALLY, AKIRA IS ON TWITTER, TOO.



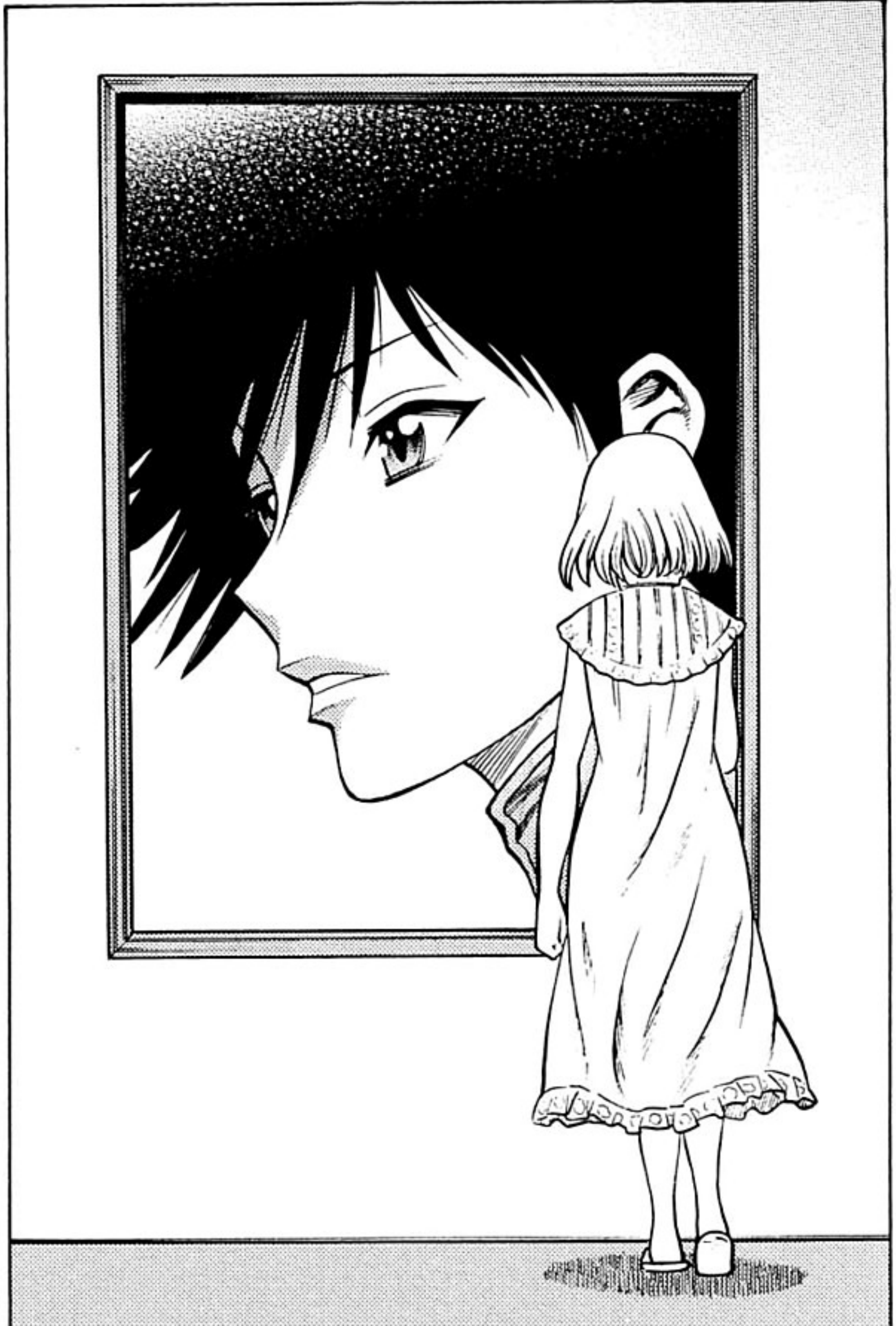
HE'S JUST A LURKER, THOUGH.

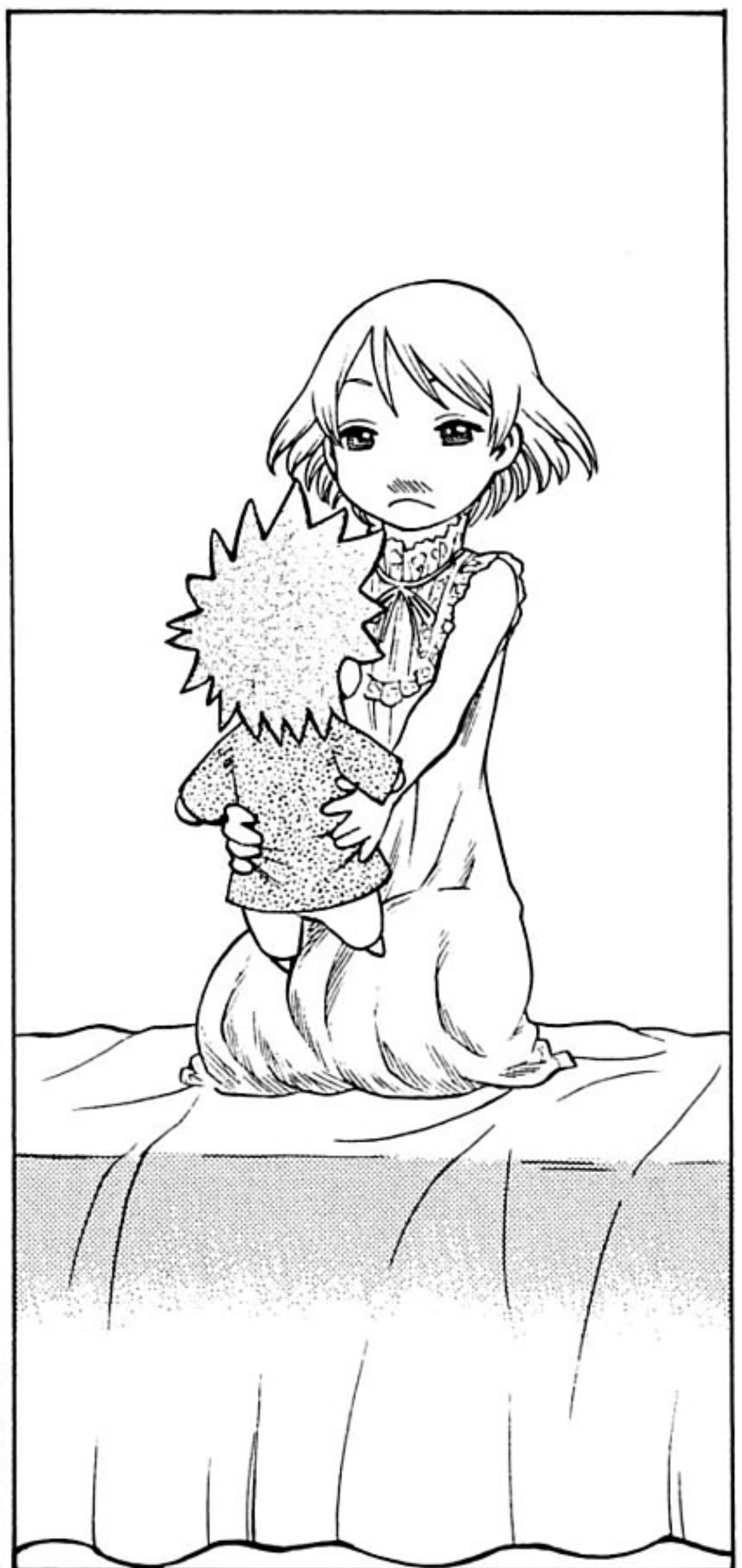
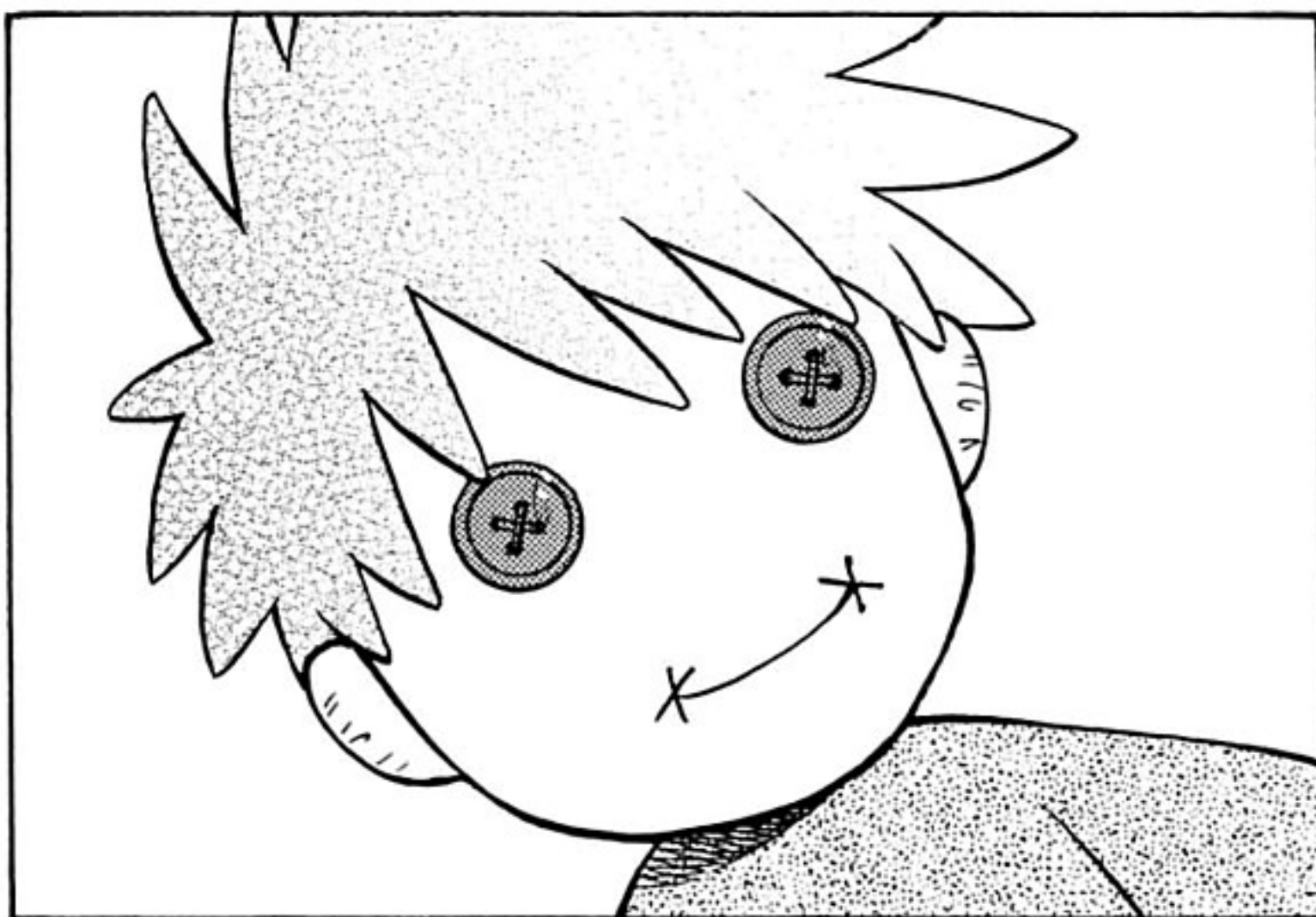
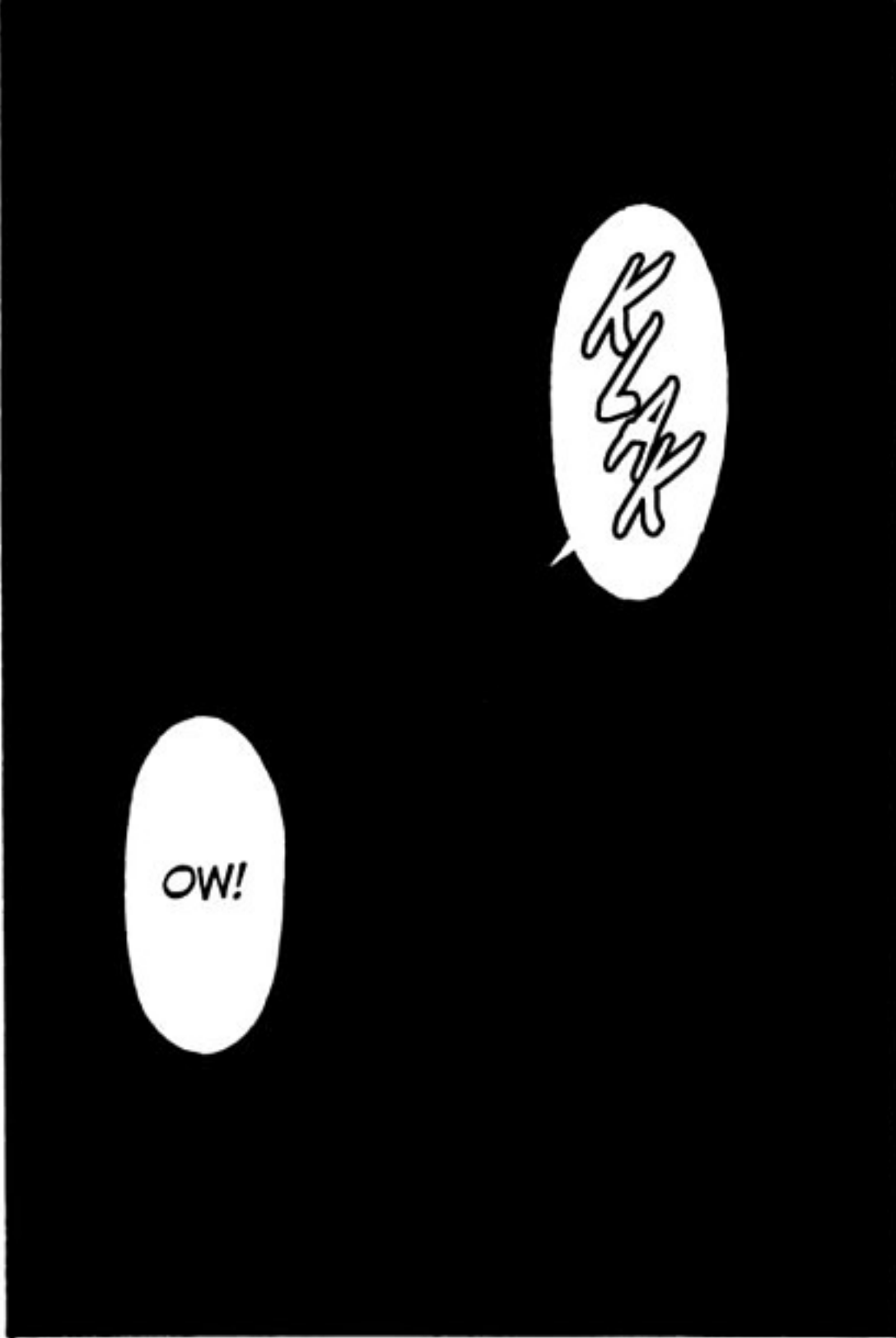
Dance in the
Vampire Bund

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

KISS×KISS













DON'T
YOU
REMEMBER
?



IT WAS
RIGHT
AFTER I
MOVED
TO THE
BLIND.

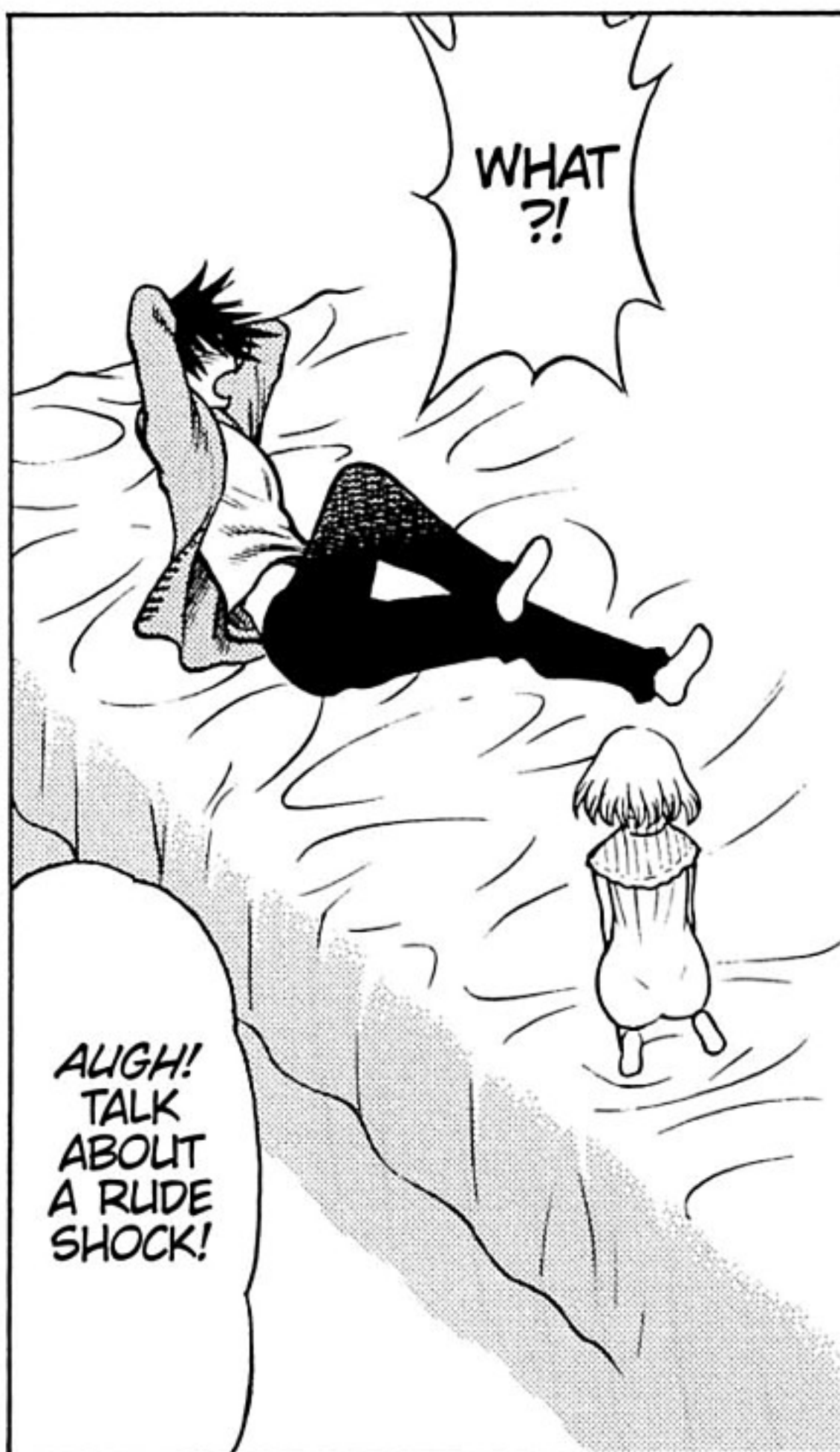


EH?

YOU
TRANSFORMED
INTO YOUR
TRUE FORM
AND SNUCK
INTO MY
ROOM AT
NIGHT.



NOW
I FEEL
STUPID
FOR
GETTING
ALL
EXCITED
ABOUT
IT.



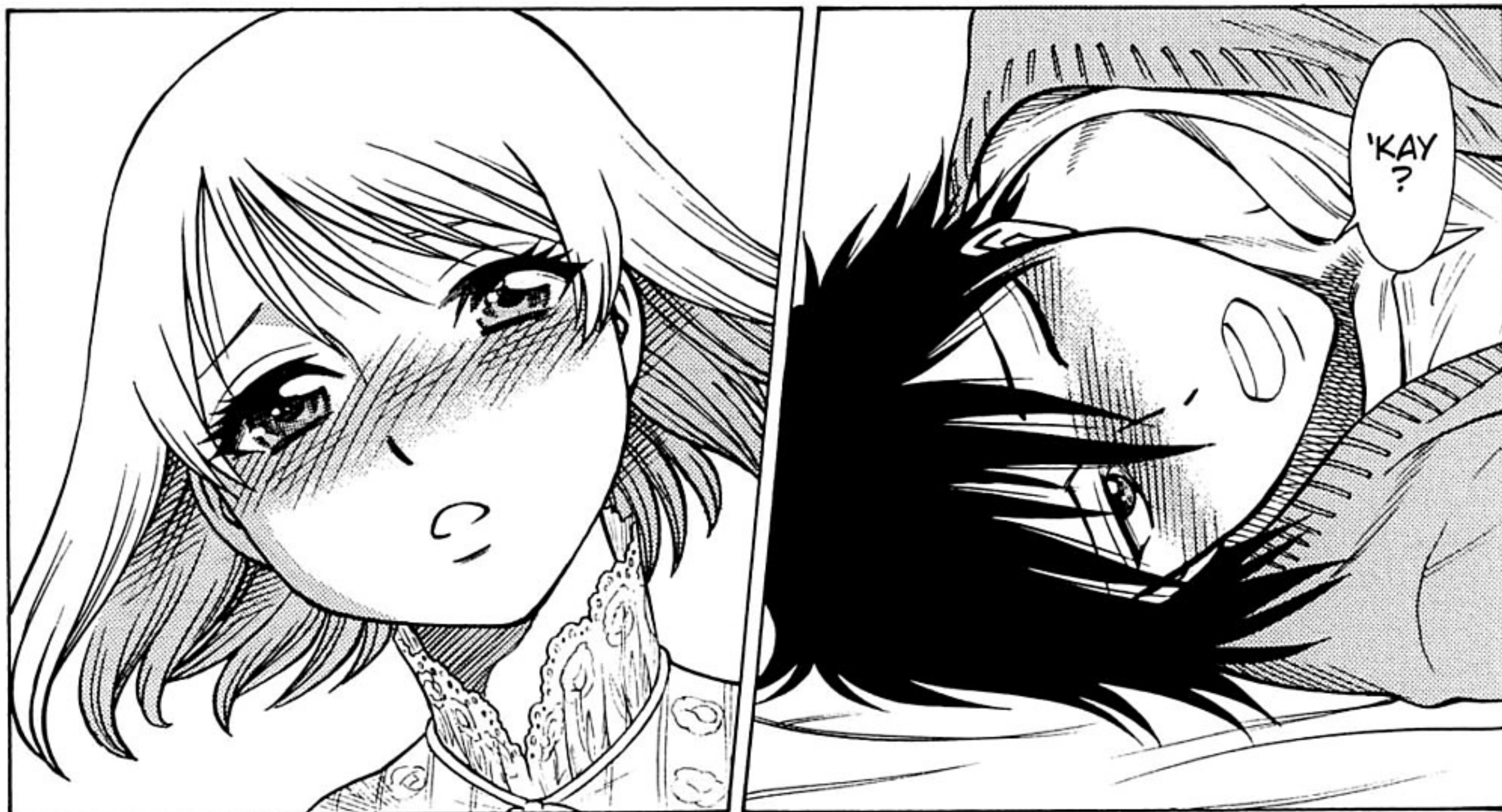
WHAT
?!

ALUGH!
TALK
ABOUT
A RUDE
SHOCK!



NOT
AT
ALL
...

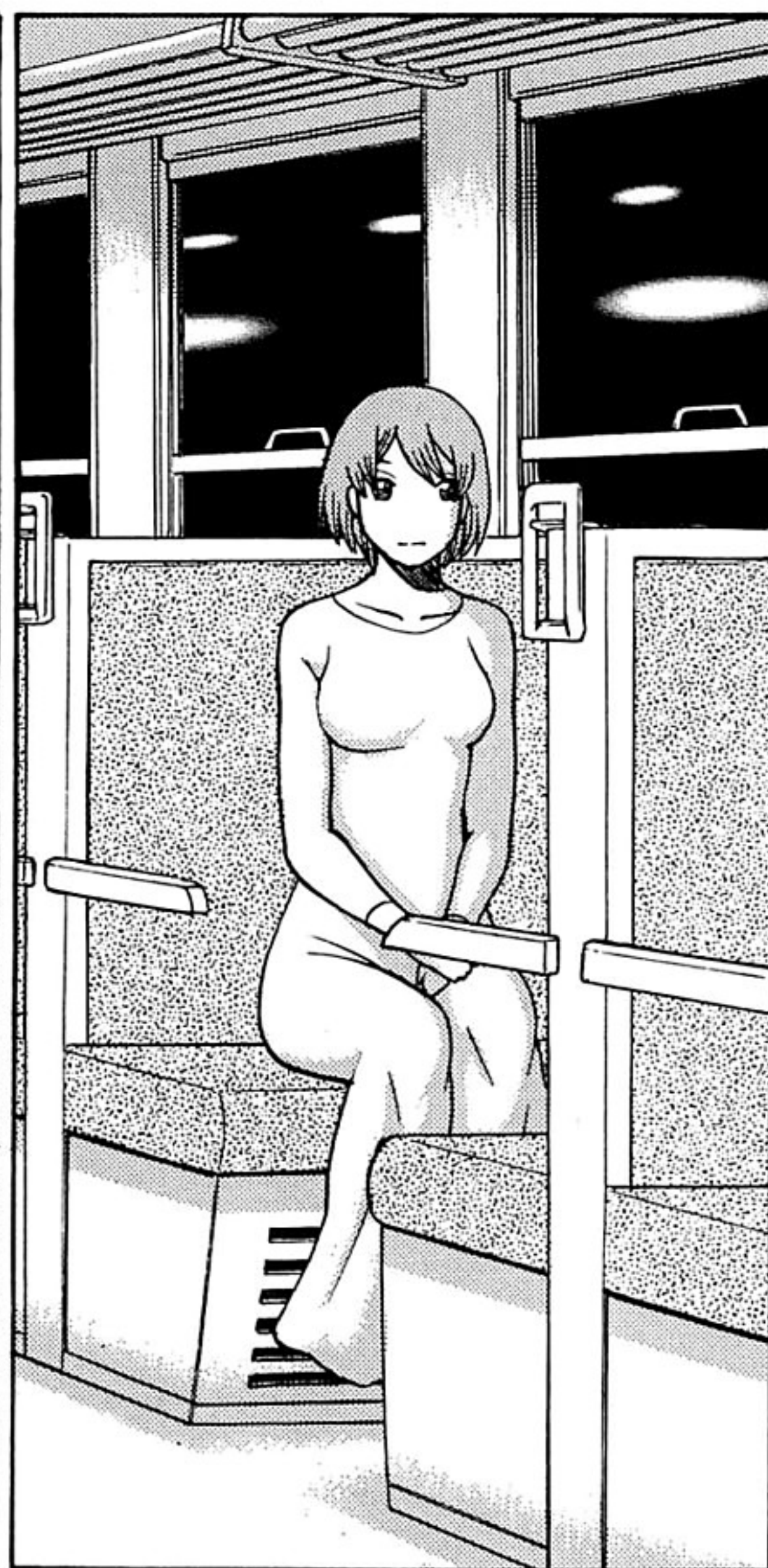
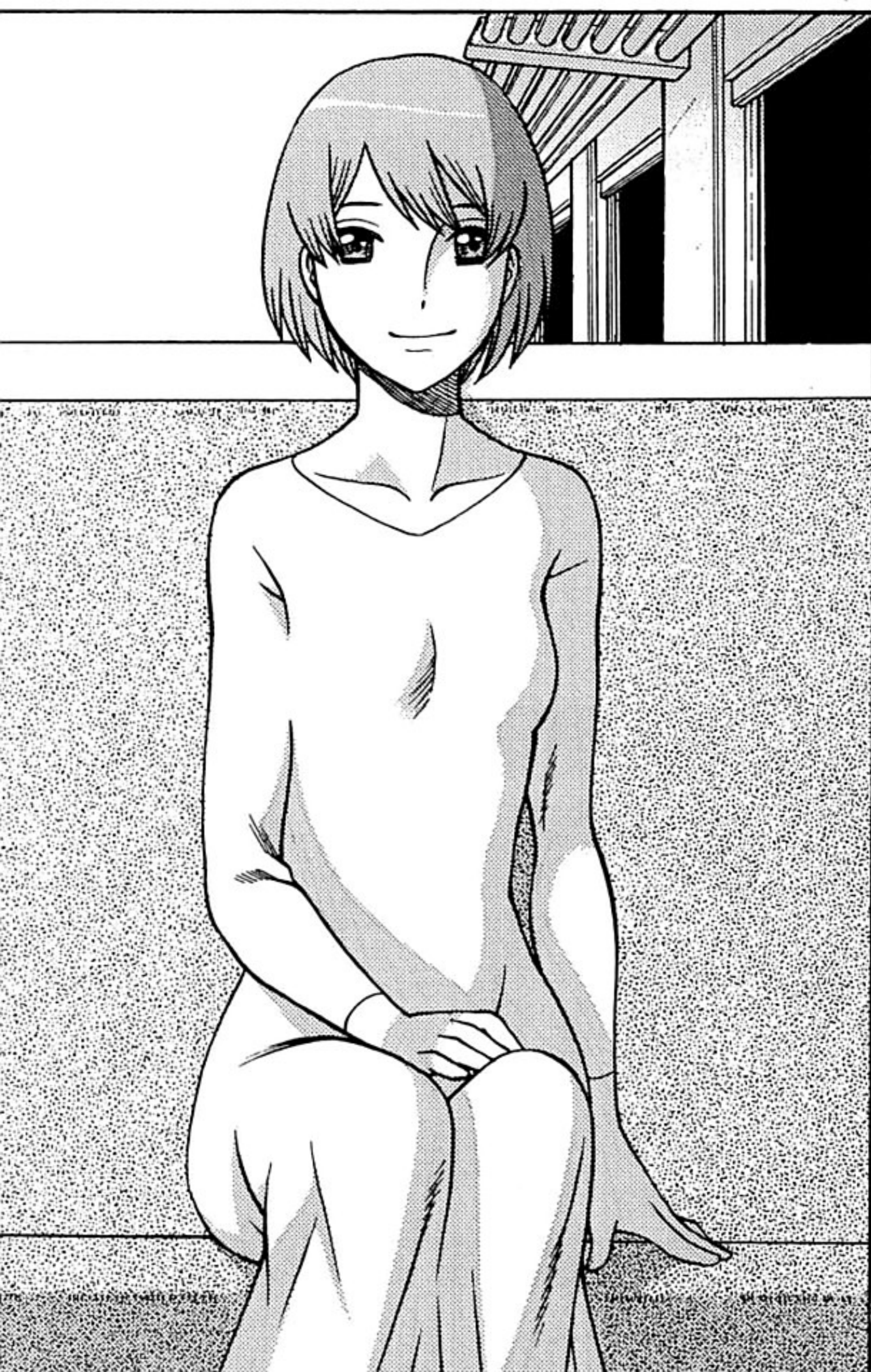
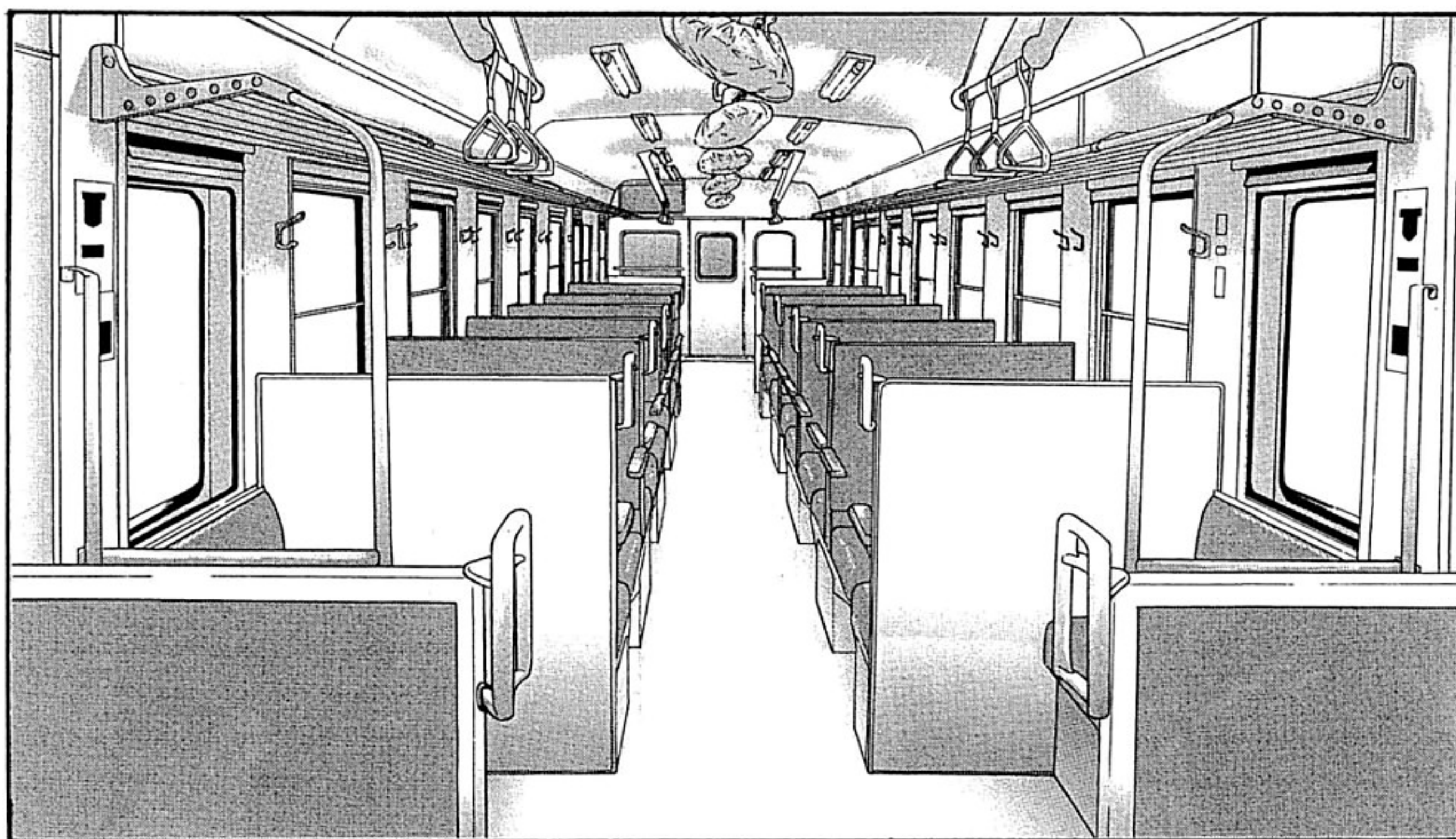






Dance in the
Vampire Bund

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

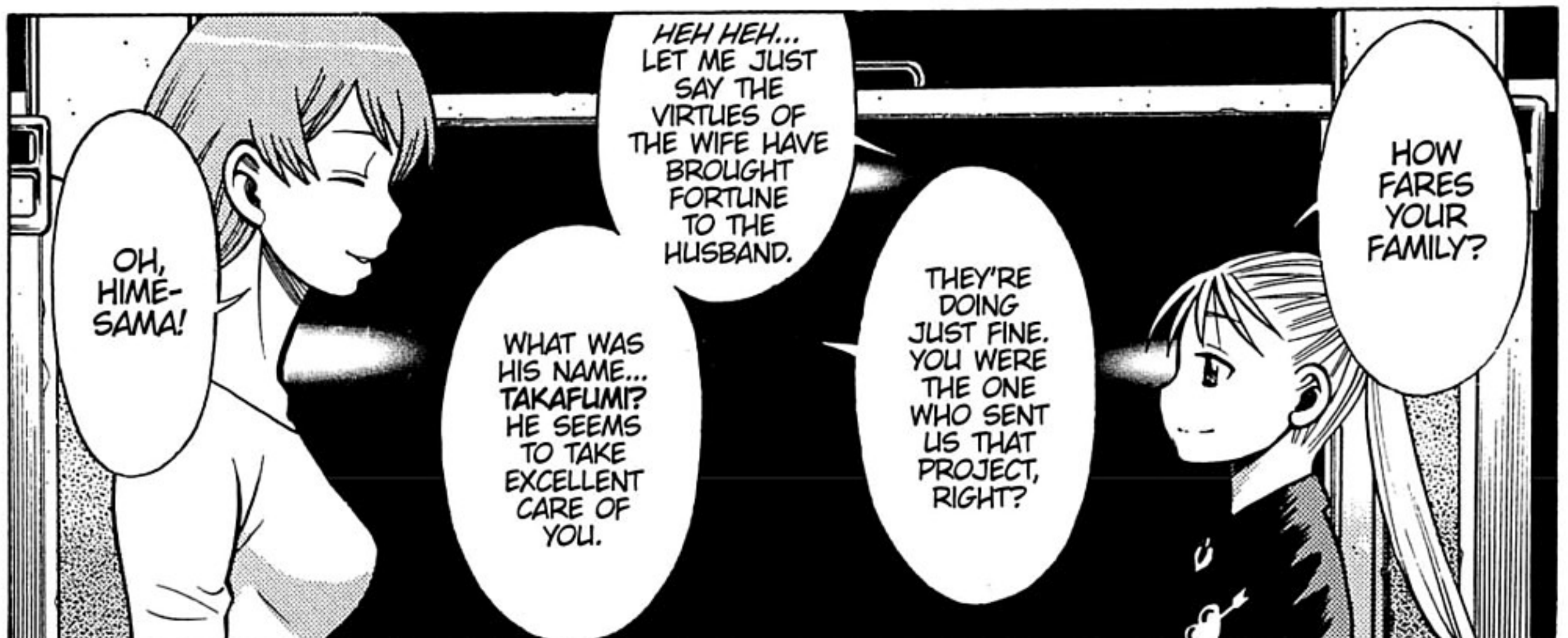




IT HAS
BEEN
QUITE
SOME
TIME.



HIME-
SAMA.



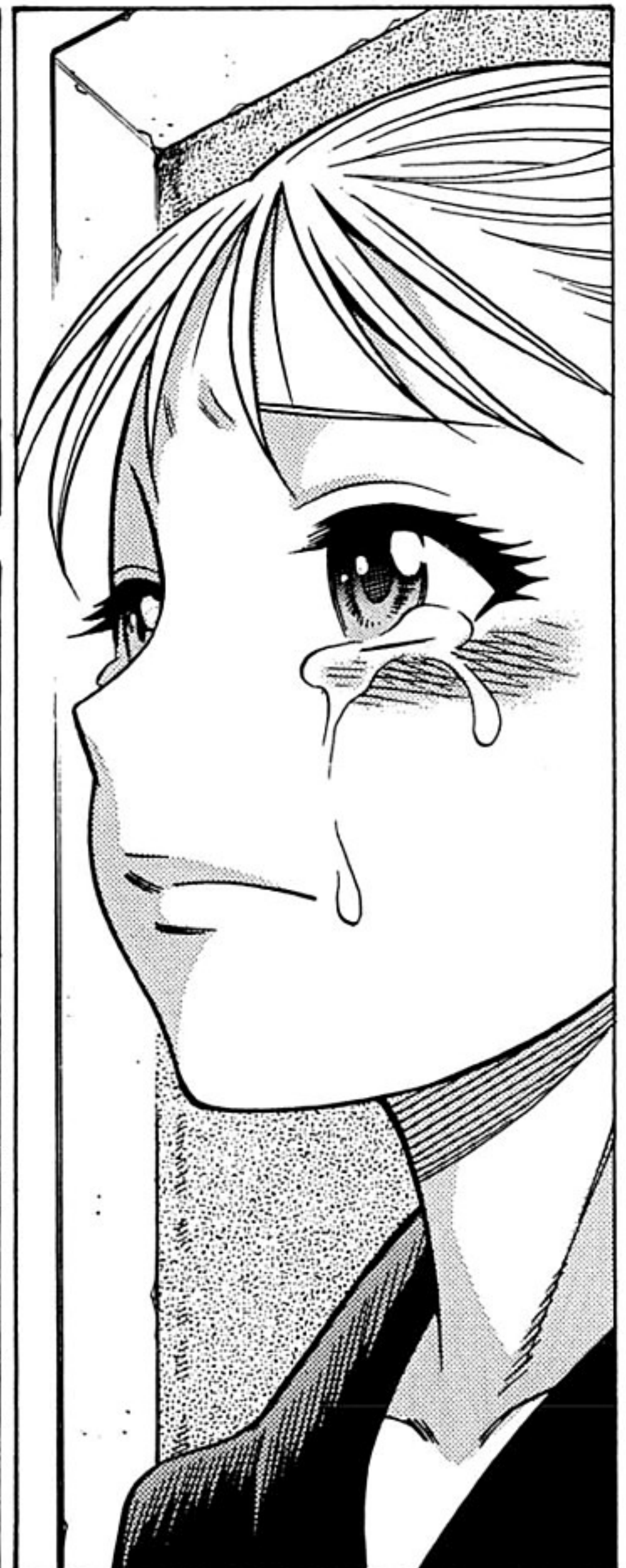
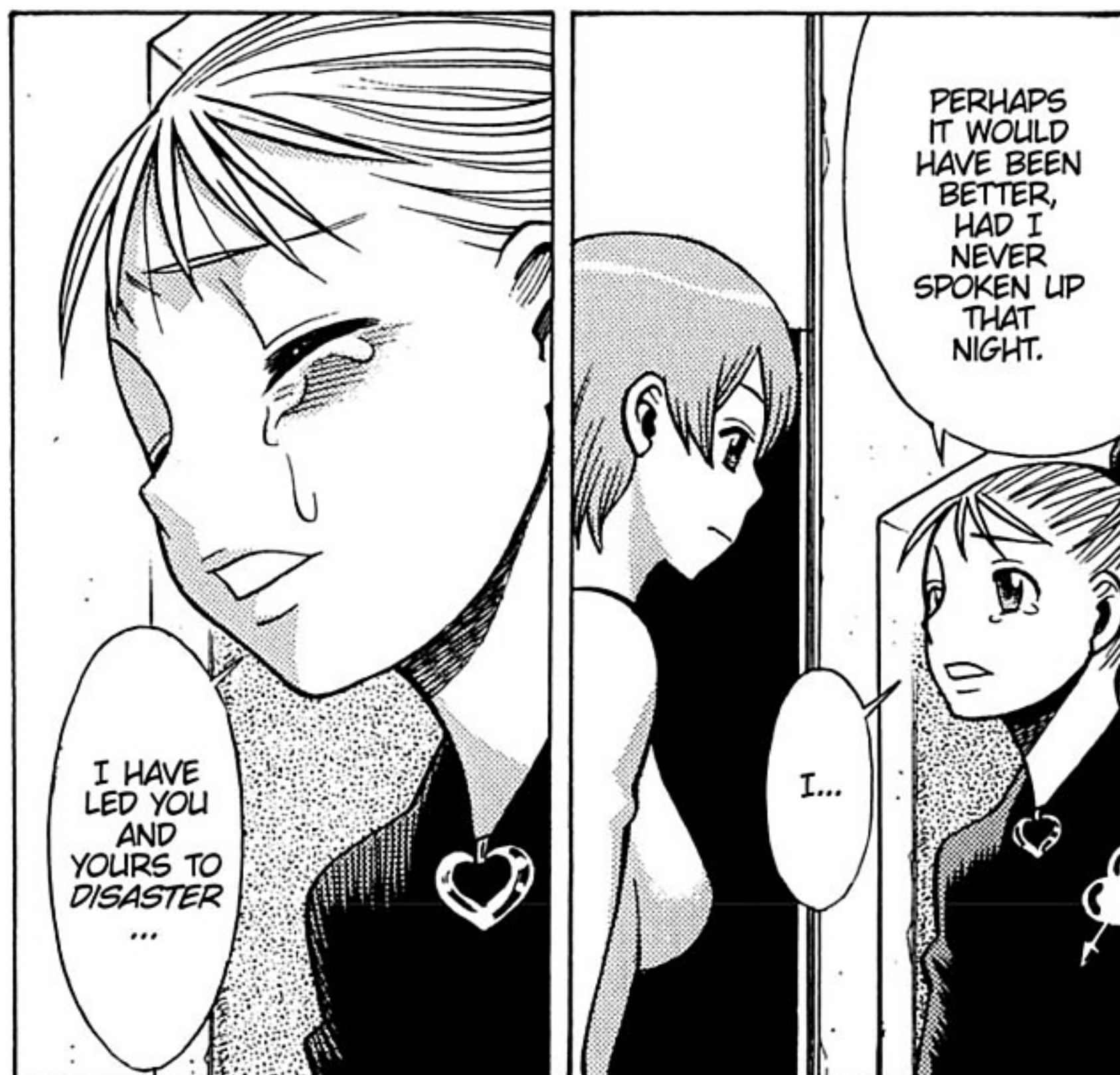
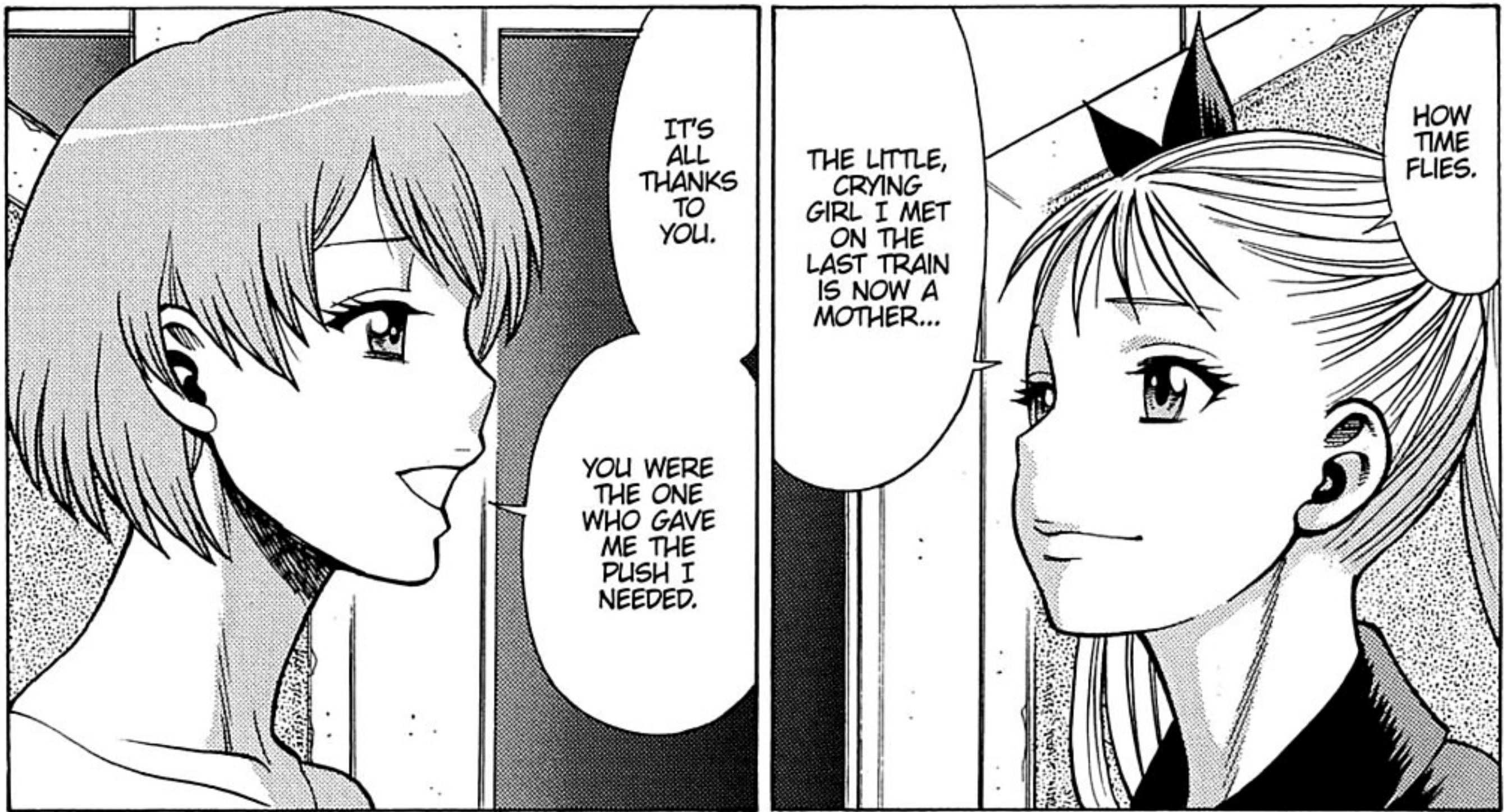
OH,
HIME-
SAMA!

WHAT WAS
HIS NAME...
TAKAFUMI?
HE SEEMS
TO TAKE
EXCELLENT
CARE OF
YOU.

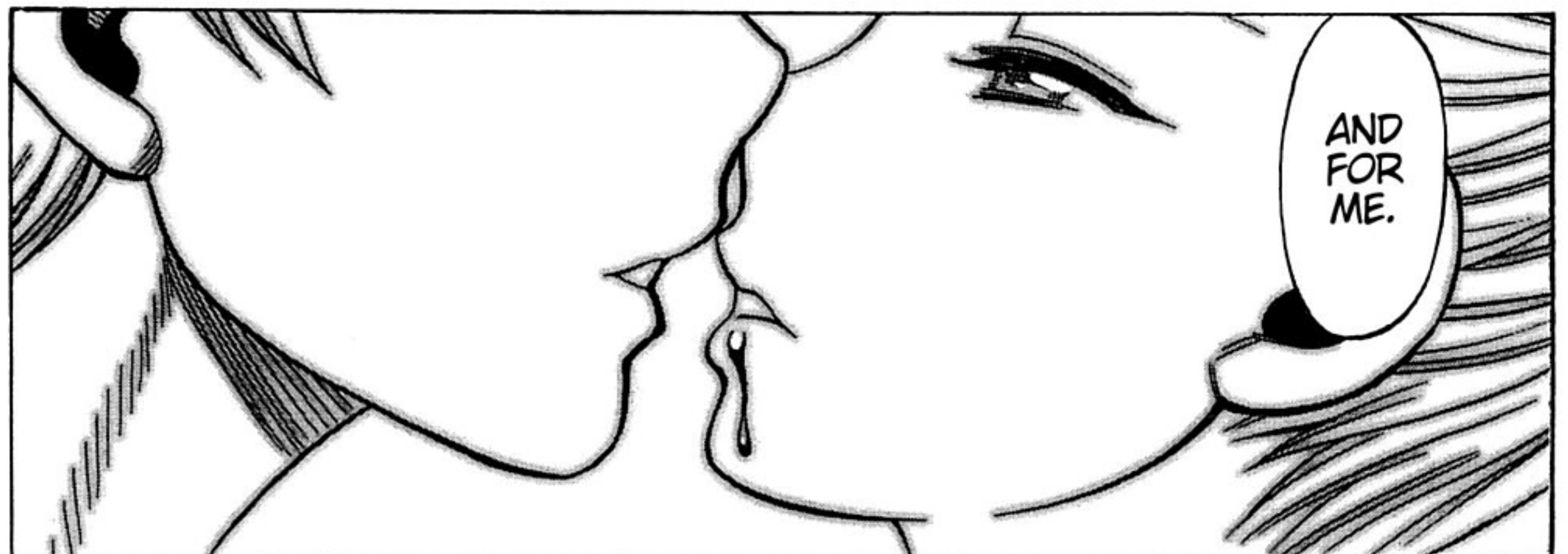
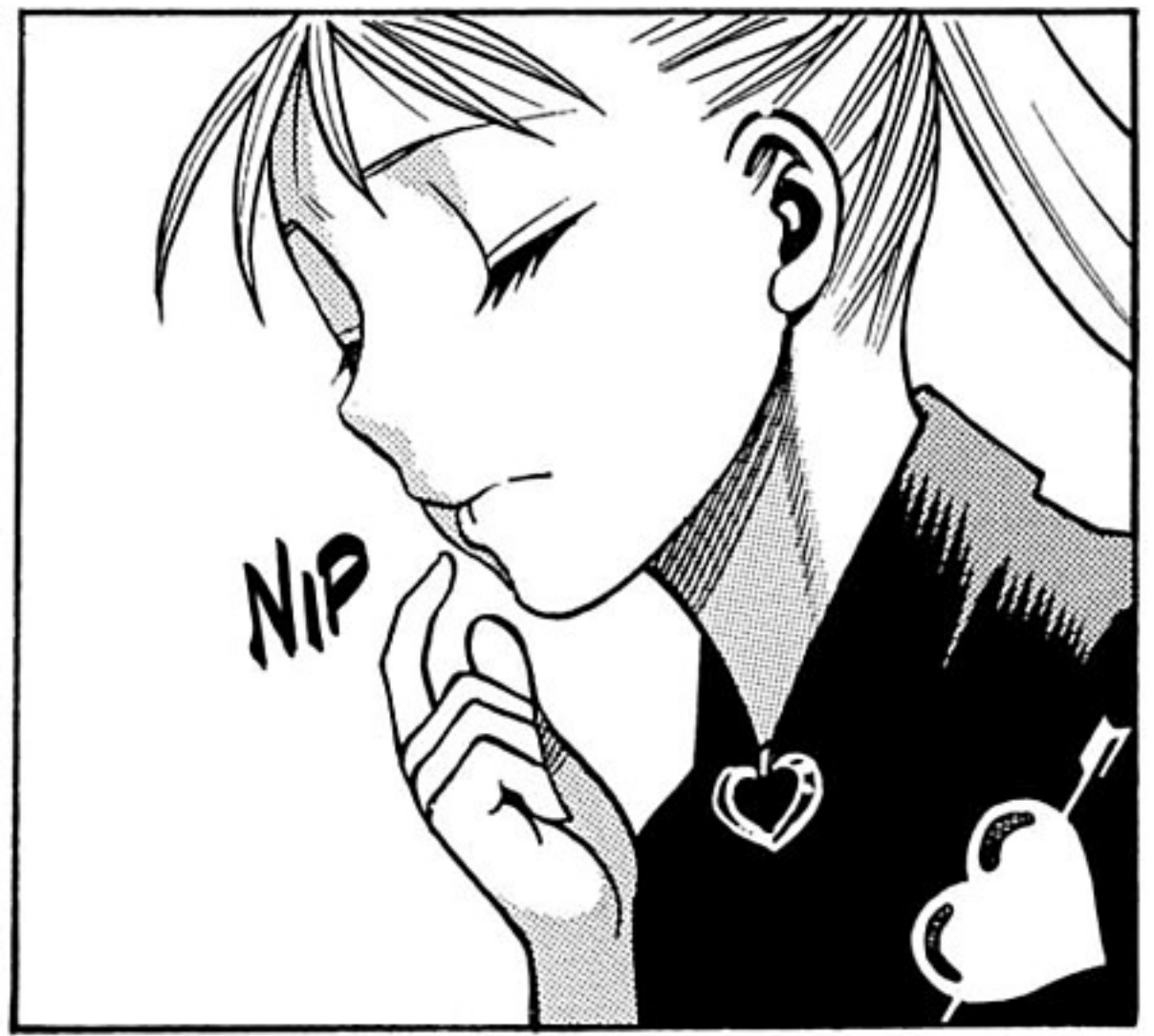
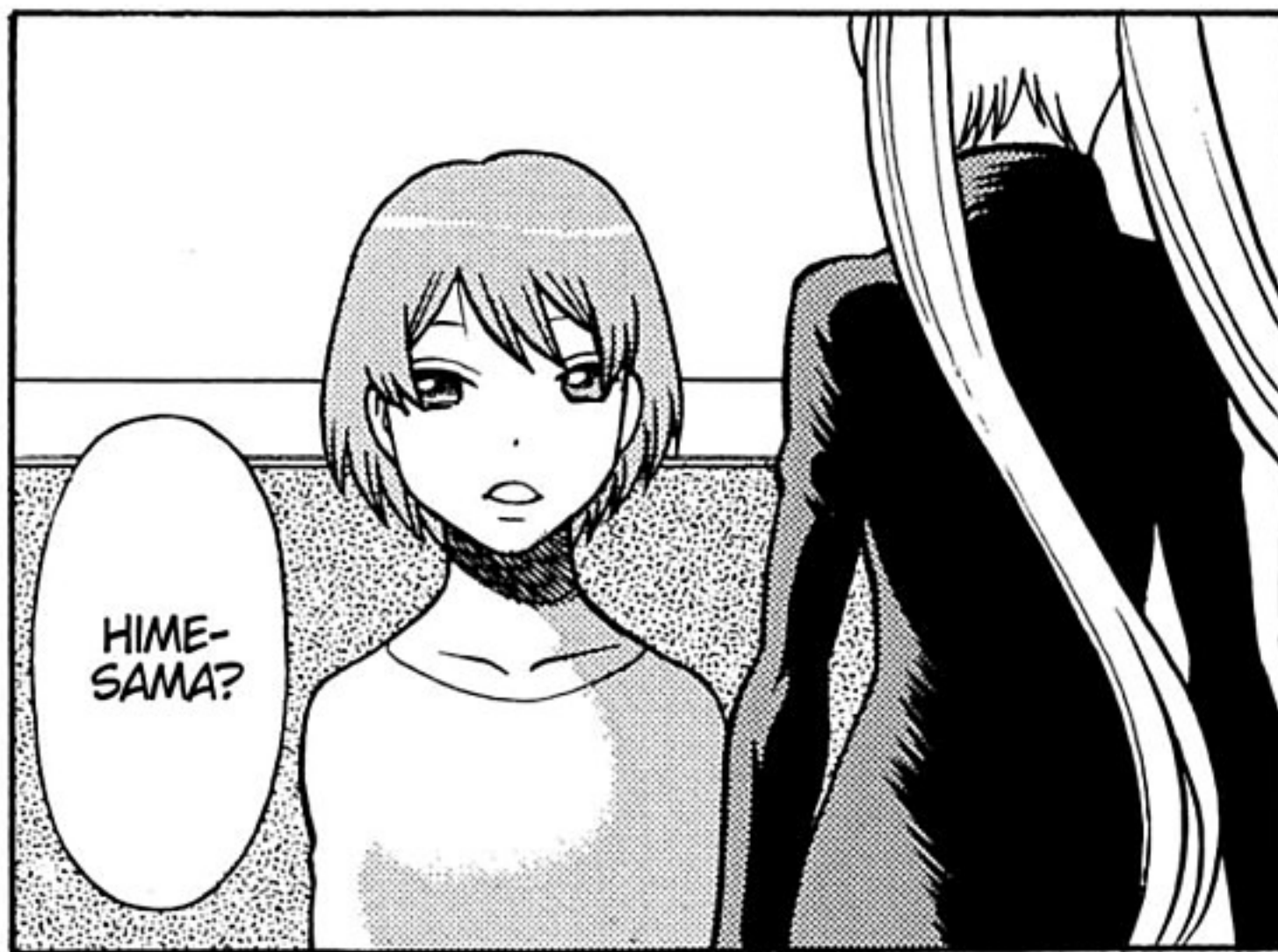
HEH HEH...
LET ME JUST
SAY THE
VIRTUES OF
THE WIFE HAVE
BROUGHT
FORTUNE
TO THE
HUSBAND.

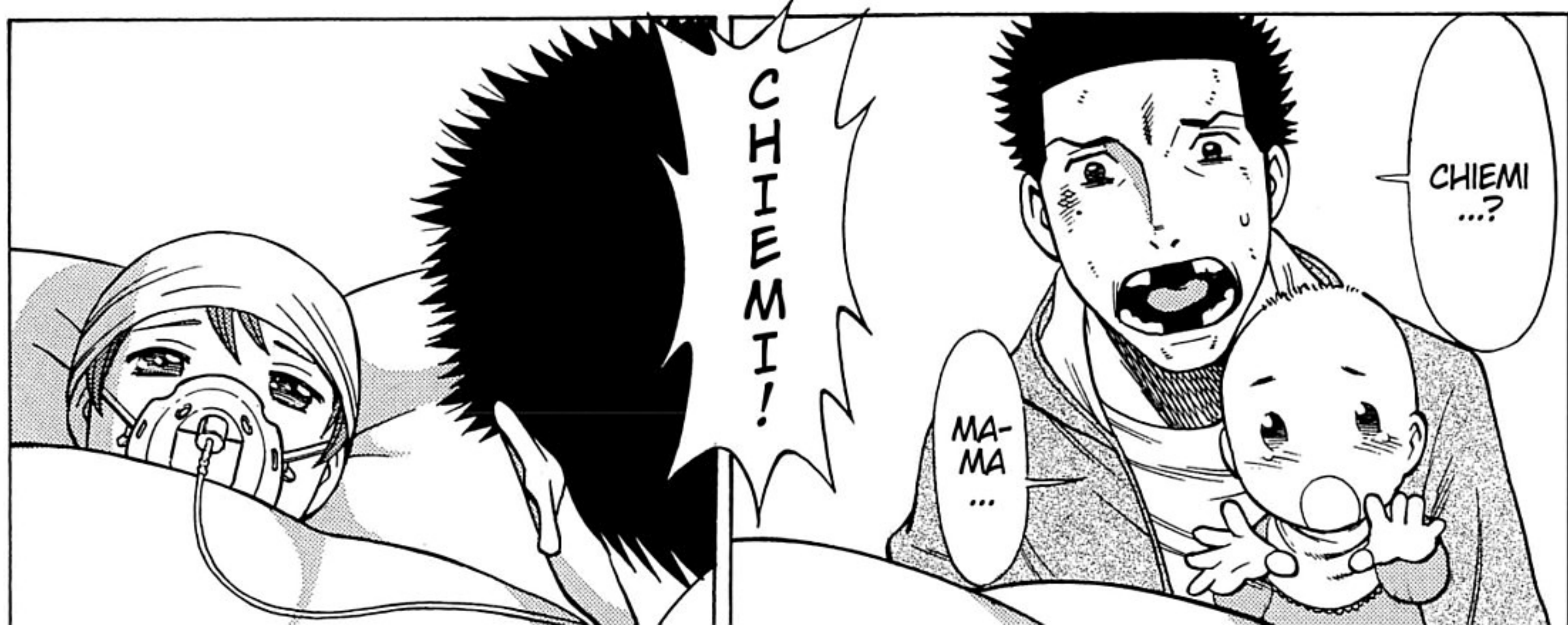
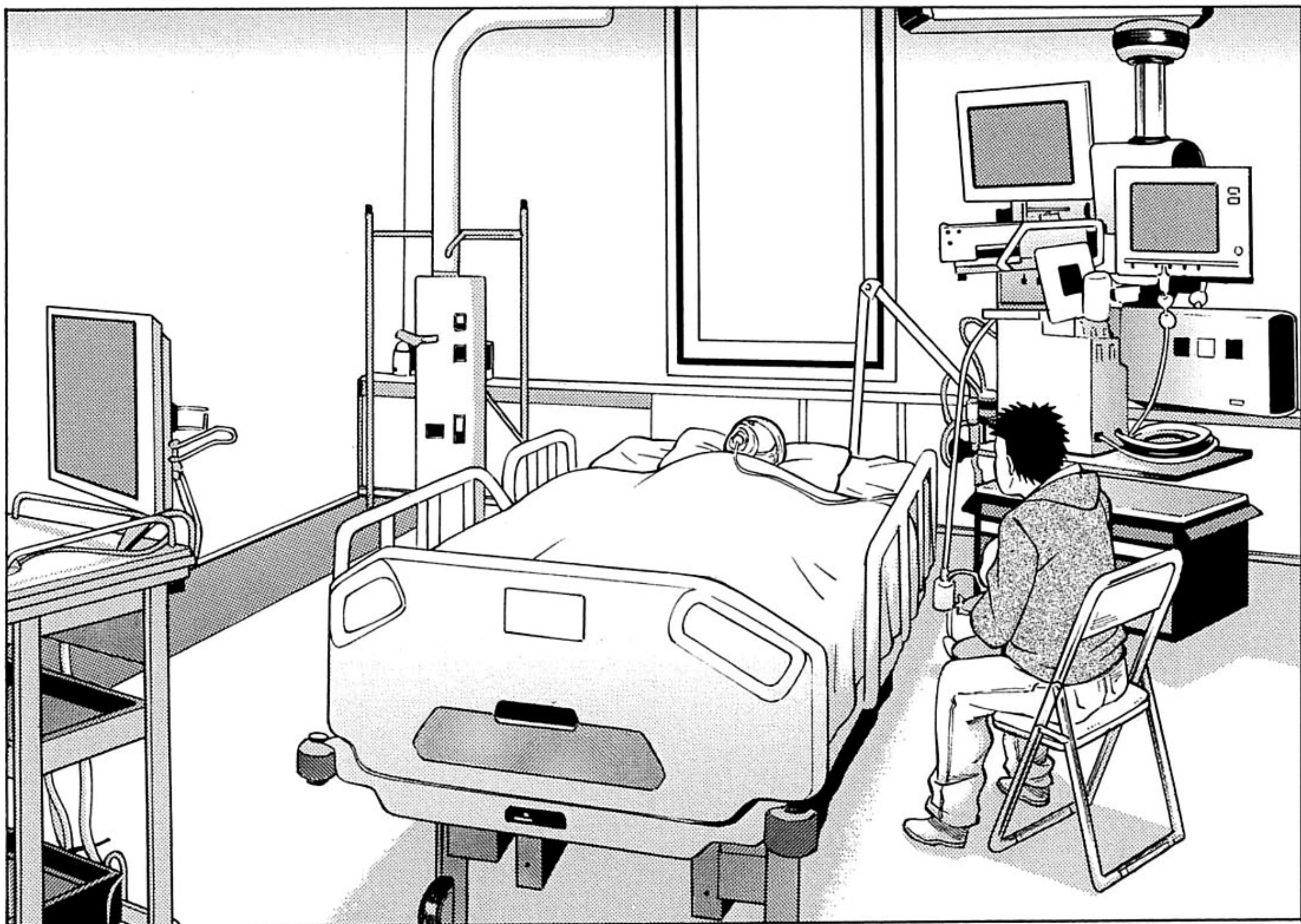
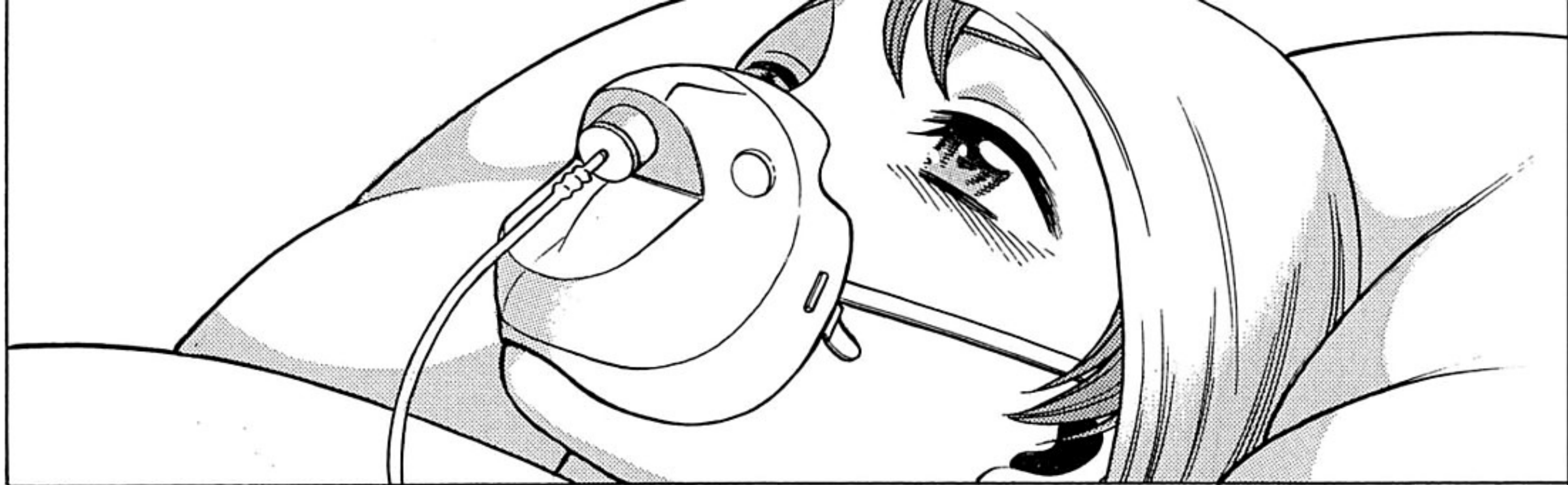
THEY'RE
DOING
JUST FINE.
YOU WERE
THE ONE
WHO SENT
US THAT
PROJECT,
RIGHT?

HOW
FARES
YOUR
FAMILY?











End

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

Dance in the Vampire Bund Trivia Collection: The Devil is in the Details

Annotations by: Tikurakuran

Have any of you ever had questions like the following when reading *Dance in the Vampire Bund*?

- Vera and Hysterica last saw each other in 1918.
What happened that year?
- So who is Mr. AB, anyway?
- Uh, what does “*nakappara*” (middle stomach) mean?

The series is littered with all kinds of information that you might not pick up on from a casual reading—from historical facts relating to vampires to the author’s entertainment choices. You really don’t have to know about them to enjoy the series, but it will make it that much more interesting, so I will explain to you these bits of trivia.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 1

Opening Quotation

From the play, *Now They Are Singing Again*, written by the Swiss playwright Max Frisch, first performed in 1945.

Chapter 1

Gutenberg's Printing Press

Gutenberg was a German goldsmith who lived during the 15th century and invented a printing technique using movable type and ink, the first of its kind. His invention was a major cultural contribution, marking the beginning of a rapid leap in mankind's speed of communicating information and accumulating knowledge. It is believed that the vampires' light-blocking gel made an impact of equal magnitude on vampire culture.

Chapter 3

Chapter Title: "Queen of the Vampires"

From the Japanese title of the 2002 American film, *Queen of the Damned*, sequel to the film from which the next trivia item gets its name, *Interview with the Vampire*. Based on the novel by Anne Rice.

Chapter 4

Chapter Title: "Interview with the Vampire"

From the 1994 American film of the same title. A man who became immortal after being bitten by a vampire tells of his checkered life. The movie attracted a lot of attention because it featured Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise playing vampires.

Chapter 5

Chapter Title: “On the Night of the Carnival”

From the 1886 painting, *Carnival Evening*, by French Post-Impressionist painter Henri Rousseau. It depicts a man and a woman, taking a stroll together through a tranquil forest on a carnival evening.

Stigma

The name of the artificial blood manufactured by House Tepes. The word comes from the Ancient Greek term referring to the mark branded on slaves and criminals. Later, the term in its plural form was applied to the scars left on Jesus Christ’s body at his crucifixion, known as stigmata.

Clothing of the Fangless

In contrast to ephemeral, hedonistic vampires, the Fangless are portrayed as simple and abstemious. It is believed that the fathers’ collarless black coats, the mothers’ long dresses, and the boys’ white shirts were patterned after the Amish, a conservative denomination

of Christians that adheres to a back-to-basics and technology-free lifestyle.

Chapter 6

Chapter Title: “Good night, Sleep tight”

A common English language bedtime idiom, wishing another restful sleep during the night.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 2

Opening Quotation

From the 1852 anthology, *Poèmes antiques*, by French poet Charles Leconte de Lisle.

Chapter 11

Chapter Title: “*Akutoku Gakuen*” (Corrupt Academy)

From the 1969 short story of the same name, by Japanese science fiction author Hirai Kazumasa. Young werewolves battle it out at a corrupt school. This story became the basis for the later *Wolf Guy* series. Furthermore, the protagonist of this story, Inugami Akira, is the namesake of our story’s Kaburagi Akira.

Chapter 12

Chapter Title: “Shape of My Heart”

From the 1993 single of the same name, by British singer

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND

Sting. It became famous in Japan in the following year, when it was used as the ending theme song for the French movie, *Léon: The Professional*. It's the song of a gambler who has sealed away the love of his heart, singing that the shape on the cards is "not the shape of my heart."

Nosferatu

A 1922 German silent film. The movie was a groundbreaking vampire film.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 3

Opening Quotation

From 1707 novel, *Le Diable boiteux*, by French novelist Alain-René Lesage.

Chapter 13

Chapter Title: "A Solemn Vow and Promise"

From the title of the ninth episode of the 1979 anime, *Anne of Green Gables*. In this episode, the protagonist Anne and her best friend Diana make a promise to become bosom friends (see below).

Ulysses, *Oliver Twist*, Byron, Rimbaud

Ulysses is a 1922 novel by the Irish author James Joyce. *Oliver Twist* is an 1837 novel by English author Charles

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

Dickens. George Gordon Byron is a 19th century English poet. Arthur Rimbaud is a 19th century French poet. All of them are great writers whose works will go down in the history of world literature. It is believed that Queen Mina read all of their works when they were first published.

“Then we’re... ‘bosom friends’”?

Taken from the promise and vow made by Anne, the protagonist of Canadian author Lucy Maude Montgomery’s 1908 novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, to her best friend Diana. Incidentally, in the aforementioned animated version of *Anne of Green Gables*, “bosom friends” was translated into Japanese using a term meaning “friends of the heart.”

Chapter 14

Chapter Title: “The Shadow Goes”

From the Japanese title of a short story called “Who Goes There?” by American science fiction author John W. Campbell. The story is about the paranoia surrounding an alien invasion in Antarctica. It was adapted into the science fiction movie, *The Thing from Another World*.

Chapter 15

Chapter Title: “Children of the Night”

From a novel of the same name, by American author Dan Simmons. A sickly Romanian orphan has a rare condition

that allows him to heal himself through blood transfusions.

Chapter 16

1918 in Paris

The First World War came to a close in November of 1918. Paris was the designated site of the peace conferences, and as such, a bustling center of diplomacy. It is believed that Vera and Hysterica attracted a lot of attention in high society at that time.

Chapter 17

Chapter Title: “*Bôryaku no Chess Game*” (A Strategic Game of Chess)

From the action novel, *Bôsatsu no Chess Game (A Murderous Game of Chess)*, by Japanese author Yamada Masaki. After taking his revenge on a gang leader, a boy on the run gets caught up in an intel war over a lost cutting-edge patrol plane.

Ancient Sumerian

The language used in the Ancient Mesopotamian civilization more than six thousand years ago. In the human world, it went out of common use at around 200 BC. As it is still in use in the vampire world, we can get a glimpse of just how long vampire history and culture has existed.

The Blood of Agni

Agni is the Sanskrit word for fire. It is also the name of the Hindu god of fire.

Romulus and Remus

The names of the twins said to be the original founders of Rome. Legend has it that they were the children of Mars, the god of war, and that they were raised by wolves. The name “Rome” comes from the name of its first king, Romulus.

Shinjuku NS Building

A skyscraper that really exists in West Shinjuku. The giant clock that was blown up in the vampire suicide bombing is called the Yukkurhythm Pendulum Clock, listed at one time in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the world’s largest pendulum clock. [Note: Yukkurhythm is a portmanteau of *yukkuri* (slow, leisurely) and rhythm.]

Chapter 19

Chapter Title: “*Mi mo Kokoro mo*” (Body and Mind)

From the 1977 single of the same name, by the Japanese rock group, Downtown Boogie Woogie Band. It was used as an insert song in the final episode of the 1980 television drama *Tantei Monogatari* (*Detective Story*), making it an unforgettable song for fans of Matsuda Yûsaku.

Spanish flu

A strain of influenza that became a pandemic in 1918 and continued into the following year. Half of the world's population contracted the disease, and approximately 20 million died. In Europe, the First World War accelerated its spread, and it was one of the reasons the war hastened to a close.

Dance with the Vampire Maid

“But there is no zipper.”

From the webcomic, *Tonari no 801-chan* (*My Neighbor Yaoi-chan*), by Ajiko Kojima. The protagonist, Yaoi-chan, looks like an ordinary woman, but when she finds an object of fangirlish passion, the zipper on her back comes undone, and her true personality leaps out.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 4

Opening Quotation

From *The Piccolomini*, second play in the *Wallenstein* trilogy by German playwright Friedrich von Schiller.

Chapter 20

“Why did the chicken cross the road?”

A common English language idiom. Here, it's used to tease someone for telling a bad joke, as in “Your joke

was so not funny, the chicken jumped into the street to kill itself.” Taken from the 1988 American science fiction film, *Alien Nation*.

***Long Pao* (Dragon Robe)**

The name of the robe worn by Lord Li. They were worn by the Emperor and his court during the Qing Dynasty. Everyone wore a color corresponding with his rank—yellow for the Emperor, amber for the Crown Prince, and so on. With a large dragon on the chest as the central figure, they were lavishly embroidered with glowing clouds, billowing waves, eight jewels, and more.

Chapter 23

Chapter Title: “*Senketsu no Shojo*” (Pure-Blooded Virgin)

From the title, *Senketsu no Shojo-gari* (*Huntress of Pure-Blooded Virgins*), which is the Japanese title of the 1970 British movie, *Countess Dracula*. It is a horror movie based on the life of Countess Elizabeth Báthory de Ecsed, a noblewoman in 16th century Hungary who killed hundreds of girls in her quest to maintain her beauty by bathing in the blood of virgins.

Chapter 24

Chapter Title: “*Kimi yo Fundo no Kawa o Watare*” (You Cross the River of Anger)

From the 1976 Japanese film of the same name, starring

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Takakura Ken. A detective falsely accused of murder fights a one-man war to restore his honor. It was released simultaneously in China and is known for being very popular there.

Dance with the Vampire Maid

Auguste and George

From the 1976 shôjo manga, *Kaze to Ki no Uta* (Poem of the Wind and Trees), by Takemiya Keiko. It goes without saying that the lewd scene Nero describes did not actually take place in the work.

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Opening Quotation

From the 1908 symphony, *Das Lied von der Erde*, by Austrian composer Gustav Mahler.

Chapter 25

Chapter Title: “Two Men in the Town of Darkness”

From the Japanese title of the 1973 French film, *Two Men in Town*, starring the two biggest names in French cinema, Alain Delon and Jean Gabin. It is the story of a bank robber trying to end his life of crime and the social worker who supports him in his endeavor.

Chapter 26

Chapter Title: “intermedio”

A brief musical production, performed between the acts of a play.

Chapter 27

“Read it in a book.”

Reference to the 1977 action novel, *Agni o Nusume (Steal Agni)*, by Japanese author Yamada Masaki. A team of down-and-out office workers attempts to disarm a bomb at a heavily guarded nuclear power plant. The line, “The most important thing is not to hesitate when it’s time to pull the trigger,” was spoken to the protagonist by his mercenary instructor.

Chapter 28

Chapter Title: “The Spirit of the Beehive”

From a 1973 Spanish film of the same name. It is a poetic portrayal of young sisters living in war-torn Spain. During the course of the film, they meet and befriend an injured deserter.

Chapter 29

Chapter Title: “The Only Neat Thing to Do”

From the 1985 science fiction novella of the same name, by American science fiction writer James Tiptree, Jr. It is the sad tale of a girl on her first journey into space,

and the warm friendship she shares with the alien that possesses her.

Sekiko

She first appeared in the second volume of Kaoru Shintani's mystery manga, *Christie: High Tension* (released in English under the title *Young Miss Holmes*). The series was originally published in *Monthly Comic Flapper*, the same magazine that serializes *Dance in the Vampire Bund*. When Mina and Vera made a guest appearance in "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire," Sekiko appeared as an original Shintani character. As a return gift, Sekiko was imported into this work. This crossover story is available from Seven Seas Entertainment in the omnibus *Young Miss Holmes Casebook 1-2* (ISBN: 978-1-935934-86-8).

Chapter 30

Chapter Title: "The Cradle Will Rock"

From the 1937 musical of the same name, directed by American actor Orson Welles. The government temporarily banned the play from being performed on stage, so the cast circumvented the ban by performing in a different theater and singing from the audience seats.

Mister AB

His real name is not revealed in this story. However,

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from clues such as his initials, his profession as a writer, his 100-year writing hiatus, and *The Devil's Dictionary*, one might surmise that he is, in fact, American author Ambrose Bierce. Known for his malicious and bitter writing style, his most famous work is *The Devil's Dictionary*. He was last seen in war-torn Mexico in 1913. Why he became a vampire and what he is doing in the Cradle remain a mystery.

The Corsican Brothers

The 1844 novel by French author Alexandre Dumas. Conjoined twins are separated at birth, and after growing up in two entirely different environments, they work together to avenge their father's death. Like the twins in *Dance in the Vampire Bund*, the boys have a psychic link, and if one gets hurt, the other feels his pain. As a side note, there is an episode with the same name in Tezuka Osamu's work, *Black Jack*.

The Devil's Dictionary

The representative work of the aforementioned Ambrose Bierce, written in 1911. Written as a dictionary, it takes various words and attaches ironic definitions, filled with black humor.

Chapter 31

Chapter Title: "A Man Should Better Himself"

From the theme song of the same name in the Chinese action movie series, *Once Upon a Time in China*. The first movie in the series was released in 1991. The star, Jet Li, gives a dashing performance as a historical martial artist from the Qing Dynasty.

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Opening Quotation

From the 1880 anthology, *Aphorismen*, by Austrian author Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach.

Chapter 32

Chapter Title: “*Sledgehammer e Dengon*” (A Message for Sledgehammer)

From the title of Yahagi Toshihiko’s novel, *Mike Hammer e Dengon* (*A Message for Mike Hammer*). Mike Hammer, suspicious of his friend’s so-called accidental death, sets out to find the truth and exact revenge. The name Mike Hammer is also the name of a fictional detective created by American author Mickey Spillane. A sledgehammer is a large hammer that requires both hands to use.

Chapter 33

Inuzuka Shino of the Satomi Hakkenden

One of the protagonists in *Nansô Satomi Hakkenden*

(Legend of the Eight Dogs of Nansô Satomi), a play written by Edo playwright Kyokutei Bakin. Gambling on the ancient Japanese tradition that raising a sickly boy as a girl will make him stronger, the boy was brought up female, since he was small.

Chapter 34

Chapter Title: “Her Majesty’s Wolf-Man”

From the Japanese title, *Her Majesty’s 007*, of the 1969 British film, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*. The tenth of the 007 series, and the only movie starring the second James Bond actor, George Lazenby.

Chapter 35

Chapter Title: “Wings Intertwined, Branches Interlaced”

A Japanese idiom referring to an intimate relationship between a man and a woman. See below.

Bai Juyi

A Chinese poet from the Tang Dynasty. Also known as Bai Lo-tien.

Matsuo Bashô’s writings

In *Oku no Hosomichi* (*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*), Bashô writes, “Even those with wings intertwined and branches interlaced must end up here.” The quote expresses the fleetingness of life, saying that even those

who have pledged eternal love must all enter the grave. The “branches interlaced” line is an allusion to the aforementioned idiom.

“That we wished to fly in heaven, two birds with wings of one, and grow together on earth, two branches as of one tree.”

A passage from Bai Juyi’s poem, *Chaghen ge* (*The Song of Everlasting Regret*), they are Yuang Guifei’s words of eternal love to Emperor Xuanzong. The “two birds with wings of one” comes from a mythological Chinese bird that only has one wing and one eye and can only fly when the male and female of the species are joined together as one. The “two branches as of one tree” are two branches of two different trees that are interlaced and have become as one branch, their grains melded together.

Chapter 36

Chapter Title: “Passion Play”

A general term referring to religious plays that depict the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They have taken many forms, as they have been performed since the early days of Christianity. In various genres, one may see such works as the classical oratorio, *St. Matthew Passion*; the film, *The Passion of the Christ*; and the musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Chapter 37

Chapter Title: “It’s a Wonderful Life”

From the 1946 American film of the same name. When an ordinary everyday man, played by James Stewart, attempts suicide, an angel appears and shows him that his life was not meaningless. A timeless masterpiece and America’s most beloved film.

Sleep of Death

The images depicted on the top and bottom of this page are from the 1958 American film, *Dracula*. The role of Count Dracula was played by Christopher Lee, who has appeared recently in such film series as *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

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Red rose, white rose, yellow rose

From the light novel series, *Maria-sama ga Miteru* (*Maria Watches Over Us*), by Konno Oyuki. The series takes place at an all-girls’ school, where the three girls who make up the student council are called Roses, distinguished by three colors: red, white, and yellow.

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Opening Quote

From the epic poem, *Divine Comedy*, by 13th century

poet Dante Alighieri. These words were engraved on the gateway to Hell, passed through by the protagonist Dante when he visited the afterlife.

Chapter 1

Chapter Title: “Magical Mystery Tour”

From a 1967 movie of the same name, starring the English rock band, The Beatles. The Beatles go on a bus tour and encounter all manner of strange happenings.

The Man with the Tribal Tattoos

The same man played Russian roulette with Akira in Chapter 5 of *Dance in the Vampire Bund*. The man on the left is still recovering from the head wounds he received in that same chapter.

Chapter 3

Chapter Title: “At the Earth’s Core”

From a 1976 British sci-fi film of the same name, based on Edgar Rice Burroughs’s science fiction novels about Pellucidar, the land at the earth’s core. A young businessman exploring underground arrives in a subterranean world where the sun shines bright and giant creatures roam.

Chapter 4

Chapter Title: “The Queen and I”

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Taken from the title of the 1956 American musical film, *The King and I*.

Chapter 5

Chapter Title: “The Child”

From the Japanese title of the 1976 Spanish horror film, *Who Can Kill A Child?* One day, children suddenly start killing adults. This unique work portrays children as monsters.

Harvey

He first appeared in the short story, *Death of a Salaryman*, which first appeared in the “Fever Dream” *doujinshi* released at Comic Market in summer of 2009. This character was not created by the author of *Dance in the Vampire Bund* but collaboratively by *doujinshi* artists.

Chapter 6

Chapter Title: “Night on Earth”

From the 1991 film of the same name. It portrays the human bonds between taxi drivers and their passengers in five major cities, such as Los Angeles, Paris, and Rome.

Favela

A word referring to the slum areas in the Brazilian metropolis of Rio de Janeiro.

Chapter 7

Chapter Title: “Human Farm”

Taken from the title of episode 22 of the 1968 special effects series, *Ultra Seven*. In the episode titled *Ningen Bokujô* (Human Ranch), aliens try to use the bodies of women for food production.

Kobayashi Akira

An actor and singer who became popular in the late 1950s. In film, he won fame in the *Wataridori* (*Rambler*) film series, and in music, he has released such hits as “*Mukashi no Namae de Deteimasu*” (“I’m Going by My Old Name”) and “*Atsuki Kokoro ni*” (“A Fiery Heart”).

Chapter 9

Chapter Title: “Police Stronghold”

From the Japanese title of the 1976 American action film, *Assault on Precinct 13*. It depicts the epic battle between a street gang and police officers held hostage at the precinct surrounded by the gang.

The Precinct

This is the first scene depicting Hama performing his regular duties at the police precinct.

Chapter 10

Chapter Title: “The Rose at the Top of Heaven”

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At the climax of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Dante rises into the heavens, where he sees in the distance a rose of dazzling white light.

Closing Quote

A verse from *The Inferno*, part of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Epilogue

Chapter Title: "What a Wonderful World"

A song released in 1968, with American jazz musician Louis Armstrong performing the vocals. Its Japanese title is "*Kono Subarashiki Sekai*" ("This Wonderful World").

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 7

Opening Quotation

From the 1886 work, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliche*, by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

Chapter 38

Chapter Title: "Demon Seed"

From a 1977 American film of the same name. A newly invented organic computer goes rogue and impregnates a human woman. The movie was based on a novel by the modern horror writer Dean Koontz.

Pied Piper

Referring to a flute player in a multi-colored costume. Generally, it alludes to the title character in the fairy tale, “The Pied Piper of Hamelin.” The people of Hamelin had been suffering from an increased rat population, and at their request, the piper successfully lured the rats out of town with his flute. But when the townspeople renege on their promise to pay him, he uses his flute to lure away all of the town’s children.

Chapter 39

Chapter Title: “*Ôkami no Monshô*” (Crest of the Wolf)

From the 1973 Japanese film of the same name. It depicts a boy with the blood of wolves running in his veins, who infiltrates a corrupt school and fights evil there. It is based on the *Wolf Guy* series by science fiction writer Hirai Kazumasa. This film marks the silver screen debut of Matsuda Yûsaku.

***Nakappara* (middle stomach)**

A condition of feeling unpleasant and nauseated on the inside.

Sanin, Angie, Graham

From the shôjo manga, *Hamidashikko*, by Mihara Jun. It began in 1975. Four children leave their families and wander the streets together, suffering and growing

through various hardships. Of the four main characters, three of their names correspond to members of the Ceremony of Trials. The boy that corresponds with Akira is named Max, but he does not appear in this work.

Chapter 40

Chapter Title: “The Wolf’s Hour”

From a novel of the same name, by American modern horror writer Robert McCammon. The novel was published in Japan as *The Wolf’s Hour*, using a different *kanji* than what was used in the chapter title. It is an action horror story about a werewolf who is a British intelligence officer. He infiltrates Nazi Germany and uncovers plans for a mass genocide. The protagonist is a native of Russia, who honed his werewolf abilities as a boy in the wilds of Siberia.

Chapter 41

Chapter Title: “Dog Day Afternoon”

From a 1975 American film of the same name, starring Al Pacino. The protagonists attempt to rob a bank, but after a mistake, they end up holding hostages in the bank as they deal with the police.

Chapter 42

Chapter Title: “Elegy for a Wolf”

From the Japanese title of the 1970 Italian film, *Città*

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Violenta (Violent City). Charles Bronson plays a lone wolf hitman who is betrayed by the woman he loves and is now seeking his revenge.

Chapter 43

Chapter Title: “Wolf, Never Cry”

From the 1983 live-action Disney film, *Never Cry Wolf*, depicting the relationship between a biologist and wolves in the Arctic. All of the chapters featuring Sanin (Chapters 39 to 43) have titles relating to wolves.

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Opening Quote

A verse from the 1909 poem, *Gitanjali*, by Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore.

Chapter 44

Lord Scott

Named and modeled after the American actor George C. Scott. The reason he has been alive for hundreds of years, despite not being a vampire, is revealed later on.

Chapter 45

Chapter Title: “Nothing Hurt”

From the 1984 manga short of the same name, by

Kemonogi Yasei. This work became the opening chapter of the epic *PALM* series. The title, which means “nothing hurts; anything else?” is used paradoxically.

Chapter 46

Chapter Title: “Family Plot”

From a 1976 American film of the same name. The final film from the Master of Suspense, director Alfred Hitchcock. It’s a crime film that revolves around two couples—one with a fake psychic and the other with a kidnapper.

Chapter 47

Juggernaut

A word referring to an enormous, unstoppable force. The word comes from the name of one of the forms of the Hindu deity, Krishna.

Chapter 48

Chapter Title: “*Dôkoku*” (Lamentation)

From a 1993 single of the same name, released by vocalist Kudô Shizuka. It was later self-covered by the lyricist, Nakajima Miyuki. It is the touching lament of a woman who regrets hearing something she never wanted to hear.

Chapter 49

Chapter Title: “Or a Dog Named Betrayal”

From the Japanese title of the 2004 French film,

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Department 36. Two police officers who were once friends deepen their mutual antagonism through secret schemes and betrayal.

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Gilbert and Serge

A continuation of the *Kaze to Ki no Uta (Poem of the Wind and Trees)* gags from Volume 4. Once again, the scene recited by Nero is not in the actual work.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 9

Opening Quote

A verse from the poem, “Le Paquet Rouge,” by French avant-garde artist Jean Cocteau. It was published in 1927.

Chapter 50

The Kremlin

A palace of the old Russian Empire in Moscow. It looks out on Red Square and is currently the official residence of the President of the Russian Federation. Incidentally, the Rozenmann and Li family yachts are named, respectively, Sanssouci and Ēpánggōng, which are also the names of famous palaces.

The Old Codgers

Like Lord Scott, these were all modeled after actors from war films and action movies, specifically, Sean Connery, Ernest Borgnine, Anthony Quinn and Edward Fox.

Mustache!

A gag performed by Vera, using Mina's hair, in Volume 4's "Dance with the Vampire Maid." A joke from an end-volume bonus comic has made its way into the main story.

Chapter 51

Minister of Special Region Jurisdiction

No longer Minister Mizoguchi, who appeared in Volume 2. As Isurugi said in Chapter 13, the position is not a life-long appointment.

Chapter 52

Chapter Title: "*Vampire Sensô*" (Vampire Wars)

From the fantasy novel series that began in 1982, by Kasai Kiyoshi.

Saji-sensei

He first appeared in the 2009 short story, *Of Endless Silence and Repose*, which was included in the "THEY THIRST" *doujinshi*. His full name is Daniel Kazuo Saji. A Japanese-American, he has a lot of wartime experience from World War II. Furthermore, this character was not

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created by the author of *Dance in the Vampire Bund* but collaboratively by *doujinshi* artists.

Head nurse

Look closely, and you can tell by her face that she is the mother of the siblings Jiji, Clara, and Anna. The head nurse's design first appeared in the aforementioned *doujinshi* short story.

CIWS (sea-whiz)

Acronym for Close-In Weapon System. A general term for a shipboard weapon designed to intercept missiles and aircraft at close range. It originally referred to weapons aboard ships, but in *Bund*, they were redesigned to defend land bases.

Gargantua

A giant that appears in *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, written by French author François Rabelais in the 15th century.

Prometheus

A deity that appears in Greek mythology, said to have brought fire to mankind. This act incurred the wrath of Zeus, and Prometheus was chained to a rock, where an eagle would eat his liver while he was still alive.

Chapter 53

Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin

A mystic who worked in secret during the later years of the Russian Empire and whose past is shrouded in mystery. A self-proclaimed faith healer, he wielded influence over the Imperial family, and it is said he led the Russian Empire to its downfall. Historically, he was assassinated in 1916, but it is said that neither cyanide nor a bullet would kill him, and he finally died by drowning when he was thrown in the river. If Rasputin were a vampire, that would explain his abnormally strong life force.

Anastasia Nikolaevna Romanova

The fourth daughter of Nicholas II, last Tzar of the Romanov Dynasty of Imperial Russia. Historically, she was executed with her parents and siblings in 1918, after the Russian Revolution, but later a legend started circulating, stating that she had survived. Furthermore, her hobby of photography and the four sisters' signature OTMA (Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia) are both based on historical fact.

“Childhood’s End”

From the 1953 novel of the same name, by English science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke. It is considered one of the greatest masterpieces of science fiction novels.

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Led by the Overlords—aliens from giant spaceships that suddenly appear around the globe—mankind climbs the ladder of evolution.

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Raging Heart

The chainsaw that appears during the mini-corner in the second episode of the anime. Director Shinbô Akiyuki worked on an anime called *Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha*, and Raising Heart is the name of the protagonist's magic wand. The punch line, "the gratitude became a paper charm," is based on an actual typographical error made in the mini-corner. The kanji characters for "gratitude" and "paper charm" are very similar, and the *kanji* for "gratitude" is supposed to be the one for *rei* in "raging heart," but it got changed to "paper charm," which is not supposed to sound like *rei* at all.

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Opening Quote

A quote from the 1835 opera, *Dantons Tod*, by German composer Georg Büchner.

Chapter 54

Chapter Title: "Doppelgänger"

German for “double-goer.” Generally, it refers to a double of a living person.

Chapter 55

“This is the longest I have been separated from Her Majesty since 1910... No, longer. Two hundred years, at least. Back when that happened.”

In the eight years from 1910 until World War I ended in 1918, Vera left Queen Mina to infiltrate high society in Europe and to keep an eye on the chaotic international trends during that time. But Queen Mina was also hiding out in Europe, so they weren’t completely separated.

“Two hundred years” refers to an attack by a Rozenmann faction, as described in Chapter 77. Queen Mina disappeared afterwards, and the lack of contact between them for 20 years left deep wounds in Vera’s heart.

The other half of the Imposter’s phone conversation

It’s extremely hard to tell, but because the line about her bad language is repeated in the last chapter, it is believed that she was speaking to Tatiana. It would appear that, although she was attacked in her confrontation with Angie in Chapter 51, she managed to escape and contact her client, the Imposter Mina.

Chapter 56

Chapter Title: “Like Anne Frank”

Anne Frank was a Jewish girl born in Germany in 1929. She died at age fifteen in a Nazi Germany concentration camp during World War II. The journal she kept while hiding in Holland was published as *The Diary of a Young Girl* and is widely read as a worldwide bestseller.

The man with two pistols

The black mask, black coat and two Colt Single Action Army revolvers make him very similar to the protagonist of *Immortal Gauntlet*, a series that the author wrote for *Comic Dragon*. It is the story of a mysterious man with immortal flesh and his battle to the death with an up-and-coming Mafia gang that has New York under its thumb. The protagonist is a vampire.

It is not yet clear whether or not the two characters are one and the same, but because the man is looking for a “certain girl” in both works, the possibility that there is some connection cannot be denied.

“My regular babysitter ditched me.”

In America, it’s basically prohibited to leave a small child alone in a house. Not only will you be penalized for breaking the law, but depending on the situation, you could be sentenced to time in prison and have your children taken away from you. Poor single mothers like Jessica are no exception—to go out to work, she must hire a babysitter, and the babysitter’s fees puts pressure

on the family budget, thus creating a vicious cycle that makes it difficult to break out of poverty.

Incidentally, Jessica leaves her daughter with the awakened Queen Mina, an act which, strictly speaking, is also against the law.

Chapter 57

Chapter Title: “*Akai Giwaku*” (Red Suspicions)

From a 1975 Japanese television drama of the same name, starring Yamaguchi Momoe and Miura Tomokazu. It tells the tale of a girl afflicted with leukemia and a medical student who fall in love, and the tricks Destiny plays on them.

Miep Gies

An acquaintance of Anne Frank’s family, she helped to hide them from the Nazis. After the family was arrested, she found Anne’s diary and secretly kept it, eventually delivering it to Anne’s father.

“I came across it when I had to read it for school.”

The Diary of Anne Frank is commonly read in American high schools as part of their ethics education. This tradition started in the 1990s, when Erin Gruwell, a public high school teacher in California, assigned underprivileged students to read it, in order to teach them about the folly of discrimination and conflict. The

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students wrote a diary like Anne's and called it, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, which then became a bestseller.

Padawan

A fictional term from the American science fiction film series, *Star Wars*. It is the name for young students aspiring to be Jedi Knights.

Kaburagi Special hamburger

From something that happened in *The G.A.S.A. Cooking Class!*, the 2010 short story that was included in the "Save the Last Dance for Me" *doujinshi*.

Eggbeater, peeler

In the sixth episode of the anime, there is a scene in which Queen Mina makes a similar mistake in home economics class.

Appendix: Bedtime Story

"I don't have any health insurance."

Until the healthcare reforms under the Obama administration, America didn't have national health insurance like Japan does. People had the option of becoming members of insurance companies appointed by the government, but the system engendered adverse practices, such as denying insurance to low-income families that might delay payments or to patients with

chronic conditions that would quickly add up in cost. Because of this, it was estimated that the number of Americans who did not enjoy the benefits of insurance rose to more than 30 million. It wasn't uncommon for someone who fell ill to eventually have to sell everything they own in order to cover their medical costs.

Chapter 58

SAT

Short for Special Assault Team. A Japanese special police unit that deals with serious terrorist threats, such as hijackings and the occupation of important facilities, as well as atrocious crimes which are too much for the local special investigation units to handle alone.

Explosion at the vaccine storehouse

Details of this incident are recorded in the spin-off series, *Dive in the Vampire Bund*.

“Please do call me Cordelia.”

A line from the novel *Anne of Green Gables* (see notes for Volume 3), spoken by Anne to her new foster mother Marilla, who had just taken her home from the orphanage. Anne feels that her own name is not romantic enough, and had convinced herself that she was really Lady Cordelia Fitzgerald, but when she tells Marilla, the woman is not impressed.

There are multiple translations of *Anne of Green Gables* into Japanese, starting with the first translation by Muraoka Hanako. This quote was taken from the version that the author is most familiar with, the Matsumoto Yûko version, published by Shueisha.

Chapter 59

Chapter Title: *Matenrô* (Skyscraper) Blues

From the Japanese title of the 1980 American film, *Defiance*, starring Jan-Michael Vincent and directed by John Flynn. In a city ruled by violence, a lone sailor fights a one-man war against a vicious gang.

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The Legend of Lord Ernest

It is believed that this refers to the naval battle between England and Spain that took place in 1588. Spain lost the battle and, with it, control of the seas, leading to the rise of the British and Dutch colonial empires.

Margaretha Geertruida Zelle

A Dutch dancer from early 20th century, also known as Mata Hari. She is known for being the most famous female spy in history.

Kiss of the Rose

A plot device that first appeared in the Shintani Kaoru

manga *Christie: High Tension/Young Miss Holmes* (see notes for *Dance in the Vampire Bund* Volume 5), also published by Seven Seas Entertainment. Anyone who receives blood from a True Blood through a kiss is granted great longevity and can live for hundreds of years, without becoming a vampire.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 11

Opening Quote

From an anonymous 12th century poem, written in Provençal.

Chapter 62

Chapter Title: “The Quiet Duel”

From a 1949 Japanese film of the same name, directed by Kurosawa Akira and starring Mifune Toshirô. A doctor contracts syphilis during the war and doesn’t know how to tell his fiancée about it.

Chapter 63

Chapter Title: “Runaway Squad”

From the name of the team dispatched to deal with malfunctioning robots, as portrayed in the 1984 American film, *Runaway*, directed by Michael Crichton. It is also the title of a 2009 American TV series about people who

look for runaways.

The personage who shelters Akira

His name is Akira Garcia Fujisaki. He's a Brazilian of Japanese descent, who infiltrated the Bund with a friend who wanted to be a vampire. Once inside, Akira became a vampire against his will. He is the main character of the spin-off series, *Dive in the Vampire Bund*, available from Seven Seas Entertainment.

“I know the perfect guy to get you past the ID checks.”

Vampire Akira's encounter with Saji-sensei is depicted in Chapter 12 of *Dive in the Vampire Bund*. Chronologically, this episode occurs later.

Chapter 64

Chapter Title: “Exit through the Vampire Bund”

Taken from the title of the 2010 British and American collaborative film, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*. It was directed by the British artist Banksy, who is widely known for his street art. The film satirizes the art world that he has under his thumb.

Akira's escape

The recovery system referred to as “Skyhook” was developed by the CIA to rescue operatives from areas of conflict. This method was used in recovery operations in

Siberia and the Sinai Peninsula during the 1960s. When Hama infiltrated the Bund as Rozenmann's operative, they were ready to use that method in case he was discovered and needed an emergency escape.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 12

Opening Quote

A verse from Polish poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid's poem, "Tragedia fantastyczna." It is also the opening quote of the book upon which Polish director Andrzej Wajda's film, *Ashes and Diamonds*, is based.

Chapter 65

Chapter Title: "New York, New York"

From a 1977 American film of the same name, directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Liza Minnelli. Later, Frank Sinatra's cover of the title song became a big hit and New York City's theme song.

Mr. Church

His name, occupation and appearance all match those of the character played by Bruce Willis in the 2010 American film, *The Expendables*.

Furthermore, the term "agent" used so commonly in spy films is actually used to refer to operatives participating

in operations on the field; staff deployed by the CIA like Church are called “officers” and are there to supervise the agents.

Secret laboratory

The facility that Vampire Akira infiltrates in Chapter 11 of *Dive in the Vampire Bund*. It is believed that the object being studied there is the shape-shifter, whose head was bitten off by Werewolf Akira.

Chapter 66

Chain Smoker’s Forest

In the movie *Doraemon: Nobita and the Haunts of Evil*, based on Fujiko Fujio’s manga, there is a locale in Africa known as the Heavy Smokers Forest.

Rozenmann’s Castle

Modeled after Neuschwanstein Castle, a real castle in Bavaria, Germany. The castle was commissioned in the nineteenth century by King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who admired the chivalry of the Middle Ages and put all of his romantic tastes into its construction. Because the castle was designed by a court stage designer and not by an architect, it doesn’t have the appearance of an actual castle and is said to be extremely lacking in practicality.

Opera House in Manaus

Referring to the Amazon Theater, which was completed in 1896. It is known as one of the three biggest opera houses in the world, along with the La Scala in Milan and the Palais Garnier in Paris. Like the opera house in Paris, it was built with stone and wood. The story goes that the architect Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald planned to have the materials transported up the Amazon via steamboat, but the voyage came to a stop when the vessel got stuck in the rapids. The indigenous people carried the entire ship over land to get the materials to Manaus. This anecdote was later recreated in the film *Fitzcarraldo*, directed by Werner Herzog, and the aberrant and passionate Fitzgerald was portrayed enthusiastically by eccentric actor Klaus Kinski. However, there is no evidence that Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald ever existed in real life, as the theater's actual architect was an Italian named Celestial Sacardim.

Chapter 68

Chapter Title: "A Thousand Times for You"

From the Japanese title of the 2007 American film, *The Kite Runner*. It portrays the lives of two boys torn apart by certain events and the changes in their home of Afghanistan.

Chapter 69

Chapter Title: "*Kokô kara no Dasshutsu*" (Escape from the Tiger's Mouth)

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND

From a 1986 adventure novel of the same name, by Japanese novelist Kageyama Tamio. The night before the Second Sino-Japanese War, a misfit Japanese army officer protects a Chinese girl who witnessed the Huanggutun Incident, and they drive across the Chinese mainland from Fengtian to Shanghai in a Duesenberg automobile.

Chapter 70

Chapter Title: “El Dorado”

A legendary city of gold, said to exist deep in the Andes.

Programmed Cell Death (Apoptosis)

A type of cell death that may occur in multicellular organisms. It is a phenomenon that is actively initiated to maintain better conditions for the organism. It is a controlled cellular suicide—a programmed cell death. It is believed that through genetic transformation, if the vampire virus is detected within a werewolf’s body, all cells in the body are programmed to die.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 13

Opening Quote

A verse from “Tristan,” a sonnet by German poet August von Platen, published in 1834. The quote also appears in *Death in Venice*, written by famous German novelist

Thomas Mann.

Chapter 71

Chapter Title: “Awake, Calls the Voice to Us”

From the 1731 cantata (vocal composition) of the same name, written by German composer Johann Sebastian Bach. It is based on the parable of the virgins who were not able to greet the bridegroom because they were sleeping. It uses as its motif the Biblical scripture, “Awake, prepare for the kingdom of God.”

Chapter 72

Chapter Title: “*Shinu Koto to Mitsuketari*” (Realized in the Presence of Death)

From the 1990 historical novel of the same name, by Japanese author Ryû Keiichirô. The title comes from a line in an Edo-era treatise on the way of the warrior, *Hagakure* (Hidden by the Leaves), which states, “Bushido is realized in the presence of death.” It is the tale of two samurai who live heroic lives in the Saga Nabeshima Domain. The book remains unfinished, due to the author’s death.

Lord Connery’s costume

Lord Connery is modeled after the actor Sean Connery, and this outfit pays homage to Mr. Connery’s character, Juan Sánchez Villa-Lobos Ramírez, from the 1986 film, *Highlander*.

Chapter 73

Chapter Title: “Contagion”

From the American film of the same name, released in 2011. A deadly disease spreads across the world, causing mass panic.

The Watanabes

The grown-up versions of the girl who appears in the special chapter, “The Road to First Love” (seen in Volume 11), and the boy she likes. Because of their encounter with Queen Mina when they were young, they have a favorable opinion of vampires, which leads them to shelter their neighbors when they find themselves in danger. The child conceived at the end of the special chapter was born a healthy boy, and he appears as the couple’s eldest son, Ryôtarô. Unlike her husband, whose name had already been revealed in the special chapter as Takafumi, the woman’s first name was not revealed until this appearance, where she is called Chiemi.

Chapter 74

Chapter Title: “Ordinary People”

From the 1980 American film of the same name. A very ordinary family starts to fall apart when their eldest son dies in an accident. It won the Oscar for Best Film at the 53rd Academy Awards.

“A Frank Mueller double-face, right?”

Franck Muller is a high-end watch company, created by a Swiss watchmaker of the same name. A double-face is a type of watch with a reversible face, first designed by Franck Muller. They can easily go for more than 2,000,000 yen (approximately \$20,000 USD).

Chapter 75

Chapter Title: “Abyss”

From the 1989 American film, *The Abyss*, directed by James Cameron. The word “abyss” is taken from a quote in German philosopher Nietzsche’s book, *Beyond Good and Evil*: “When you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.”

Lord Spallanzani

His full name is Vittorio Spallanzani. He first appeared in the 2011 short story, *Hematologie du Goût*, which was included as part of the “Let the Right One In” *doujinshi*. A low-ranking noble born in the 19th century, he conducted diligent research in the pursuit of gourmet, excellent-tasting blood. This character was not created by the author of *Dance in the Vampire Bund* but collaboratively by *doujinshi* artists.

The elderly person in the wheelchair

He first appeared in the 2009 short story, *Night & Darkness*,

which was included in the “Fever Dream” *doujinshi*. A former hematologist for the Nazis, he became a retainer for House Tepes without becoming a vampire. The Fraulein Mephistopheles/Doctor Faust exchange with Queen Mina is a type of code, and the character’s real name is not revealed. This character was not created by the author of *Dance in the Vampire Bund* but collaboratively by *doujinshi* artists.

The Bergamasque Laboratory

A scientific research facility established by House Tepes. The laboratory saw its first appearance in the “No Different Flesh” *doujinshi*.

Dance in the Vampire Bund Volume 14

Opening Quote

From the 1637 opera, *Le Cid*, by French playwright Pierre Corneille.

Chapter 76

Alphonse’s father

His full name is Andrea Borgiani. He first appeared in the 2010 short story, *A Flag Full of Stars*, which was included as part of the “Save the Last Dance for Me” *doujinshi*. He devoted every effort to rebuilding House Tepes, which

had fallen to ruin in the uprising of the three branch families. This character was not created by the author of *Dance in the Vampire Bund* but collaboratively by *doujinshi* artists.

Lorenzo Trading Company

A trade company built up by the 16th century Merchant of Venice, Lorenzo. Lorenzo was human, but he worked with House Tepes after Lucrezia's death. The company later developed into Lorenzo Pharmaceuticals, manufacturing such products as Stigma and light-blocking gel. It was first mentioned in the *doujinshi* short story, *A Flag Full of Stars*.

The previous Alphonse

Andrea's father. His death is portrayed in the *doujinshi* short story, *A Flag Full of Stars*.

Black Jack

The protagonist of the Tezuka Osamu manga, *Black Jack*, which started in 1973. He passes behind the man that is secretly photographing Takafumi. For the 2012 anniversary of Tezuka Osamu's death on February 9th, Tezuka Osamu's eldest daughter, Tezuka Rumiko, sent out a call for illustrations of Tezuka works to honor him—a call which was answered by many manga artists and illustrators. The author of *Dance in the Vampire Bund* participated as well and gave Black Jack a cameo role in

the series.

Chapter 77

Chapter Title: “*Hito Toshite*” (As A Human)

From the 1980 song, “Hito Toshite” (“As A Person”), by Japanese folk song group, Kaientai. It was also the theme song for Series 2 of the television drama, *3-nen B-gumi Kinpachi-sensei* (*Kinpachi-sensei of Class 3-B*), which starred the group’s leader, Takeda Tetsuya.

The man from Lorenzo Trade Company

Looking closely, his lack of fangs reveals that he is human. He is thought to be the Nth generation head of the Lorenzo family.

Napoleon

His full name is Napoleon Bonaparte. He made a name for himself in the French military during the 18th century, and through a coup d’état, he rose to power as the Emperor of France. His appearance in this work is believed to take place around 1805, just before the British invasion.

In this series, there is a line, “I doubt that small man will make it as far as Russia,” and history tells us what became of Napoleon’s subsequent march on Russia. The French army was forced to retreat, not only due to bitter winter temperatures and starvation, but also because of

the fury of the vampire army unleashed by Archduke Ivanovic.

Rhône

A region in southeastern France that is famous for its wines.

Chapter 78

Chapter Title: “Straw Dogs”

From the 1971 American film of the same name, directed by Sam Peckinpah and starring Dustin Hoffman. The home of a mild-mannered mathematician is surrounded by insurgents, and a gruesome life-and-death struggle ensues.

Councilor Ryuu

He first appeared in the 2009 short story, *Lies & Silence*, which was included in the “They Thirst” *doujinshi*. He is a so-called “mind vampire,” who can control human minds and absorb their emotions as energy. In Chapter 76, there is a scene where Ming Mei’s followers fail to notice that the Li Clan pursuers are all around them; this was because they were under Ryuu’s mind control. However, this power does not affect True Bloods or beastmen. This character was not created by the author of *Dance in the Vampire Bund* but collaboratively by *doujinshi* artists.

Chapter 79

Chapter Title: “At the Mount Megiddo”

Megiddo is a place in central Israel. As prophesied in the Revelation of John in the New Testament, it is believed to be the place where the final battle between good and evil (Armageddon) will be fought at the end of the world.

“An elephant was playing in the spider’s web.”

From the children’s song, “The Elephant and the Spider’s Web,” lyricist and composer unknown. Elephants come one by one to the spider’s web until the singer decides there are enough. At which point, it ends with “There were so many of them, that the spider told them to go home.”

Chapter 80

Chapter Title: “The Return of the Queen”

A parody of the 2003 New Zealand film, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. The final film in the trilogy based on English author J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* novel series.

Shintôshû

A collection of folktales from Medieval Japan, containing tales relating to the origins of shrines in eastern regions such as Kanto, and to Shinto and Buddhist deities. The ten volumes contain fifty stories, including the oft-

referenced “*Suwa Engi no Koto*” (The Suwa History).

Suwa Engi no Koto (The Suwa History)

The origin story of Suwa Daimyôjin, the deity worshiped at the Suwa Taisha shrine. It is the tale of Kôga Saburô, son of the ruler of Ômi Province, who forced his way into the underground world through a cave called the Hitoana (Man-hole) Cave in Mount Tateshina, Shinano Province, in search of his kidnapped wife.

He traverses through 72 lands, including Kôshôkoku (Land of Favorable Rewards), Sôbikoku (Land of Fine Grass), Sôteikoku (Land of Grass Bottom), Sekkôkoku (Land of Falling Snow), Sôryûkoku (Land of Grass Stop), Jizaikoku (Land of At-Will), Jahôkoku (Land of Sated Snakes), Dôjukoku (Land of Tree Paths), Kôjukoku (Land of Favorable Trees), Tôbaikoku (Land of Pottery Double), Hanjukoku (Land of Half Trees), until he eventually arrives at Imankoku (Land of Fiber Silk), where he marries a princess and enjoys his life with her. However, he begins to miss the wife he left on the surface and he returns, only to discover that he has been transformed into a snake.

Because of the similar details, there is a theory that this was the basis for the Ryûgû (Dragon Palace) Legend about Urashima Tarô. The poem recited from this work, “Though they must part, he who wanders

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND

and he who remains, the journey need not be rushed,” was a poem recited for Saburô by the residents of the Netherworld as he left on his travels.

Submarine

The same submarine used by the maids in the “Dance with the Vampire Maid” short comic in Volume 11, when the maids escape from the Bund. It is almost the same model as the Ohio class ballistic missile submarine used by the United States Navy. Based on the fact that Mina’s closest aides, the maids, did not know of its existence, and the fact that Nanami, who had been hiding her existence until now, was on board, it is believed that Alphonse prepared the submarine in secret, but it is unknown how he acquired it.

CIWS Blind Spot

The CIWS were specifically designed to deal with aircraft and missiles, not with humans or other small flying objects. Because of this, the Raytheon Phalanx Block 1B is equipped with infrared sensors to combat small aquatic targets, such as suicide bombers. However, this system requires a human to select the source of the infrared rays and to tell the system to automatically pursue it. In this series, when someone says, “That should give the fire control room visual control over targeting,” this is what they are referring to.

Chapter 81

Chapter Title: “*Hana no Shôgai*” (The Life of a Flower)

From the NHK taiga drama of the same name that began its run in 1963. It is about the life of Ii Naosuke, a Tairô great elder who lived at the end of the Edo Era. As an authority figure, Ii pushed for the end of isolation during the Tokugawa Shogunate, but he was assassinated in the Sakuradamon Incident.

Final Chapter

Chapter Title: “All Good Things...”

From the title of the final episode of the American sci-fi television drama, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which began its run in 1987. (For the Japanese broadcast, the episode was titled “Voyage into Eternity.”) It is an abridgment of the proverb, “All good things must come to an end.”

Dance in the
Vampire Bund

Dance in the
Vampire Bund



IS
BECOMING
AN
ANIME!!

DANCE
IN THE
VAMPIRE
BLIND...





BECAUSE
IT WILL BE
AN ANIME
WITH
BEAUTIFUL
VAMPIRE
WOMEN!

HM?

GAH!
HIME-SAN,
COVER
YOURSELF
!!

WHAT
ELSE
COULD I
POSSIBLY
WEAR?

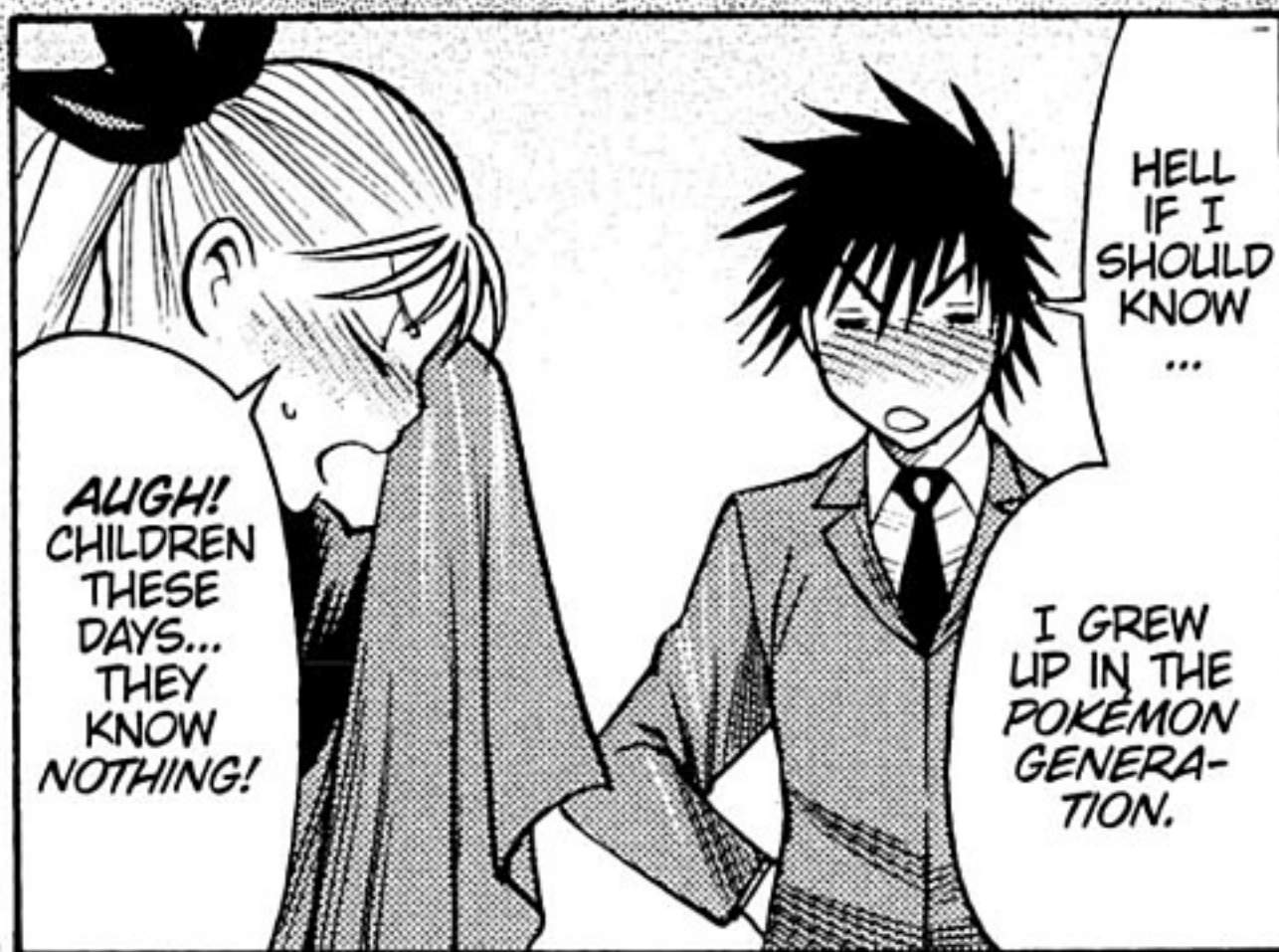
WHY
ARE YOU
WEARING
THAT
CAPE AND
NOTHING
ELSE?!



YUKI!

HURRY
UP!
WHAT IS
TAKING
YOU SO
LONG?!

WHAT,
YOU
STILL
FOLLOW
POKE-
MON?



AUGH!
CHILDREN
THESE
DAYS...
THEY
KNOW
NOTHING!

HELL
IF I
SHOULD
KNOW
...

I GREW
UP IN THE
POKEMON
GENERA-
TION.





MMMM

WE
HAVEN'T
FORGOTTEN
TO INCLUDE
SOMETHING
FOR THE
LADIES!

SPLRT



OH, WE
ALREADY
HAVE A
MEDIUM
FOR BROAD-
CAST.

HAVE A
LITTLE
COMMON
SENSE!

THERE'S
NO WAY
ANY TV
STATION
IN ITS
RIGHT MIND
WOULD AIR
SOMETHING
THIS
CRAZY!!



SORRY.

ANGIE!!



ARGH!
ENOUGH
ALREADY
!!

SHRIIP

AAH! THE
MAESTRO IS
BLEEDING
PROFUSELY
FROM HER
NOSE!

BRING
BLOOD
FOR A TRANS-
FUSION!

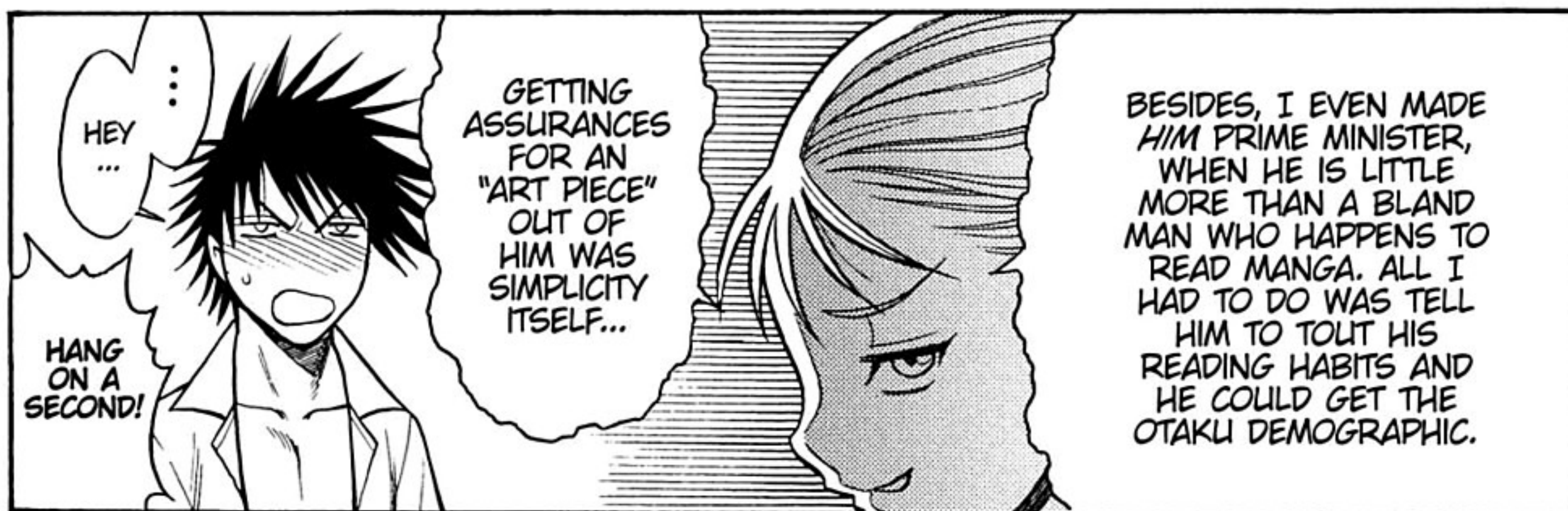


I DID PAY THE
JAPANESE
GOVERNMENT
OVER A HUNDRED
TRILLION YEN.
THIS IS THE
LEAST THEY
COULD DO IN
COMPENSATION.

W
H
A
T
?!

THE
TRUE
HOME
OF
ANIME!

THE
PUBLIC
CENTER
FOR
MEDIA
ART
(TENTA-
TIVE)

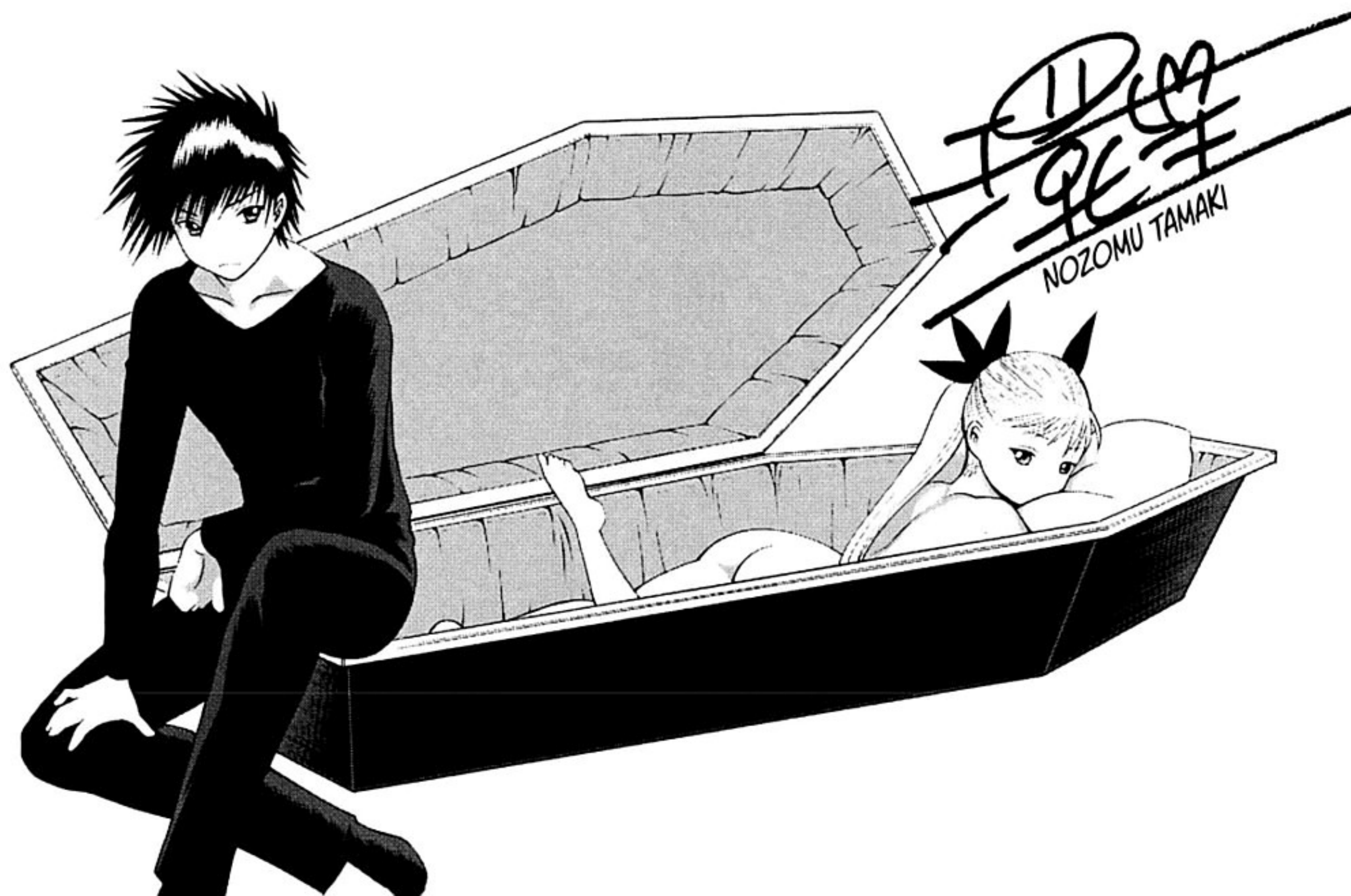


So long story short...

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND ANIME CONFIRMED!!

I know. It sounds like an April Fool's joke, right? But it's really happening. Shinbou Akiyuki directing. Script by Yoshino Hiroyuki. Character design by Konno Naoyuki. Production by Shaft. That's, like, the perfect lineup to me. And they're all diligently working away on it right now. Oh, and I go in for script meetings every week and help them come up with ideas... I'm practically staff on the project by now (*laugh*). Man, it sure is interesting watching an anime get made! The text side of it, anyway!

Now, a lot of artists don't like other people messing around with their creations, and I completely understand that. But personally, I don't mind... as long as it's in the hands of a good production team, that is. For this project, the scriptwriter, the director, the producer, and everyone involved are all working with a good, clear idea of what the core of the *Vampire Bund* story is and what they want to do, so that takes a load of stress off of me. In fact, as long as they keep the themes and highlights of the story intact, I'm all for them changing it up as much as they want (*laugh*). What happens in the first few episodes should really shock fans of the original story. Check it out... It's some awesome stuff.

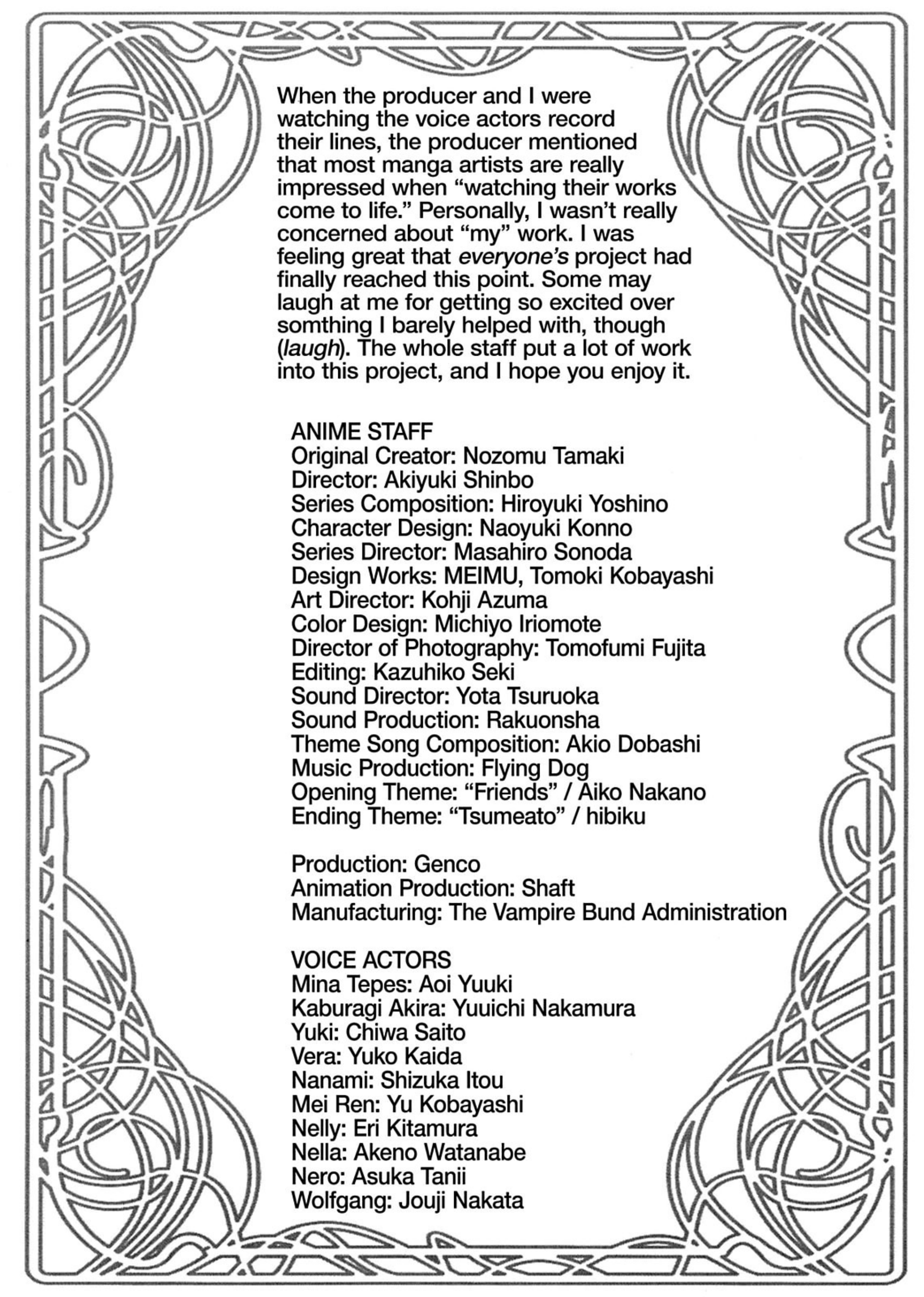


COUNTDOWN TO JANUARY 7TH!

So there is less than one week left until the *Vampire Bund* anime airs. It feels less like “It’s almost here,” and more like “It’s about time!” to me. Talk of an anime was first brought up almost exactly two years ago. I remember thinking then how far in the future it all sounded (*laugh*).

The one thing I thoroughly learned about producing an anime is just how much work the original creator has to do! No, seriously... there’s a lot. First, there is attending script meetings. Normally, the original creator’s responsibility in these meetings is to keep telling them, “Don’t change that!” In my case, I started out the first meeting by joking “Hey, let’s change all this.” I mean, Yoshino-san’s script was a really great and innovative treatment. I even went so far as to suggest mixing up some things he wasn’t certain he should touch. I wanted to see a *Vampire Bund* that was different from the original manga. So how much stuff did we change? Um... about as much as was changed in the movie version of *Galaxy Express 999* (*laugh*)?

My other big responsibilities were the scripts for the “C-part” of each episode and the storyboards. The new production company, Shaft has already made a tradition of adding a “C-part” to each episode—those quick but often important scenes between the ED and the next episode preview. They asked me once if I wanted to do them, and I said offhandedly, “That sounds fun.” They took me seriously! I came back and said I didn’t know how to draw storyboards, and they were like, “Just do them the same way you draw those omake strips at the end of each volume.” Are you sure?! Well, that’s the way I did them. I’m not sure if it was the best fit for the production process, but the staff sure seemed to like them (*laugh*). There was one more time when they asked me about something and I gave an offhand answer, not realizing that I’d get stuck doing it, but I’m keeping that secret until the first episode airs (*laugh*). Seriously, man, you can’t drop your guard around those Shaft people...



When the producer and I were watching the voice actors record their lines, the producer mentioned that most manga artists are really impressed when “watching their works come to life.” Personally, I wasn’t really concerned about “my” work. I was feeling great that *everyone’s* project had finally reached this point. Some may laugh at me for getting so excited over something I barely helped with, though (*laugh*). The whole staff put a lot of work into this project, and I hope you enjoy it.

ANIME STAFF

Original Creator: Nozomu Tamaki
Director: Akiyuki Shinbo
Series Composition: Hiroyuki Yoshino
Character Design: Naoyuki Konno
Series Director: Masahiro Sonoda
Design Works: MEIMU, Tomoki Kobayashi
Art Director: Kohji Azuma
Color Design: Michiyo Iriomote
Director of Photography: Tomofumi Fujita
Editing: Kazuhiko Seki
Sound Director: Yota Tsuruoka
Sound Production: Rakuonsha
Theme Song Composition: Akio Dobashi
Music Production: Flying Dog
Opening Theme: “Friends” / Aiko Nakano
Ending Theme: “Tsumeato” / hibiku

Production: Genco
Animation Production: Shaft
Manufacturing: The Vampire Bund Administration

VOICE ACTORS

Mina Tepes: Aoi Yuuki
Kaburagi Akira: Yuuichi Nakamura
Yuki: Chiwa Saito
Vera: Yuko Kaida
Nanami: Shizuka Itou
Mei Ren: Yu Kobayashi
Nelly: Eri Kitamura
Nella: Akeno Watanabe
Nero: Asuka Tanii
Wolfgang: Jouji Nakata



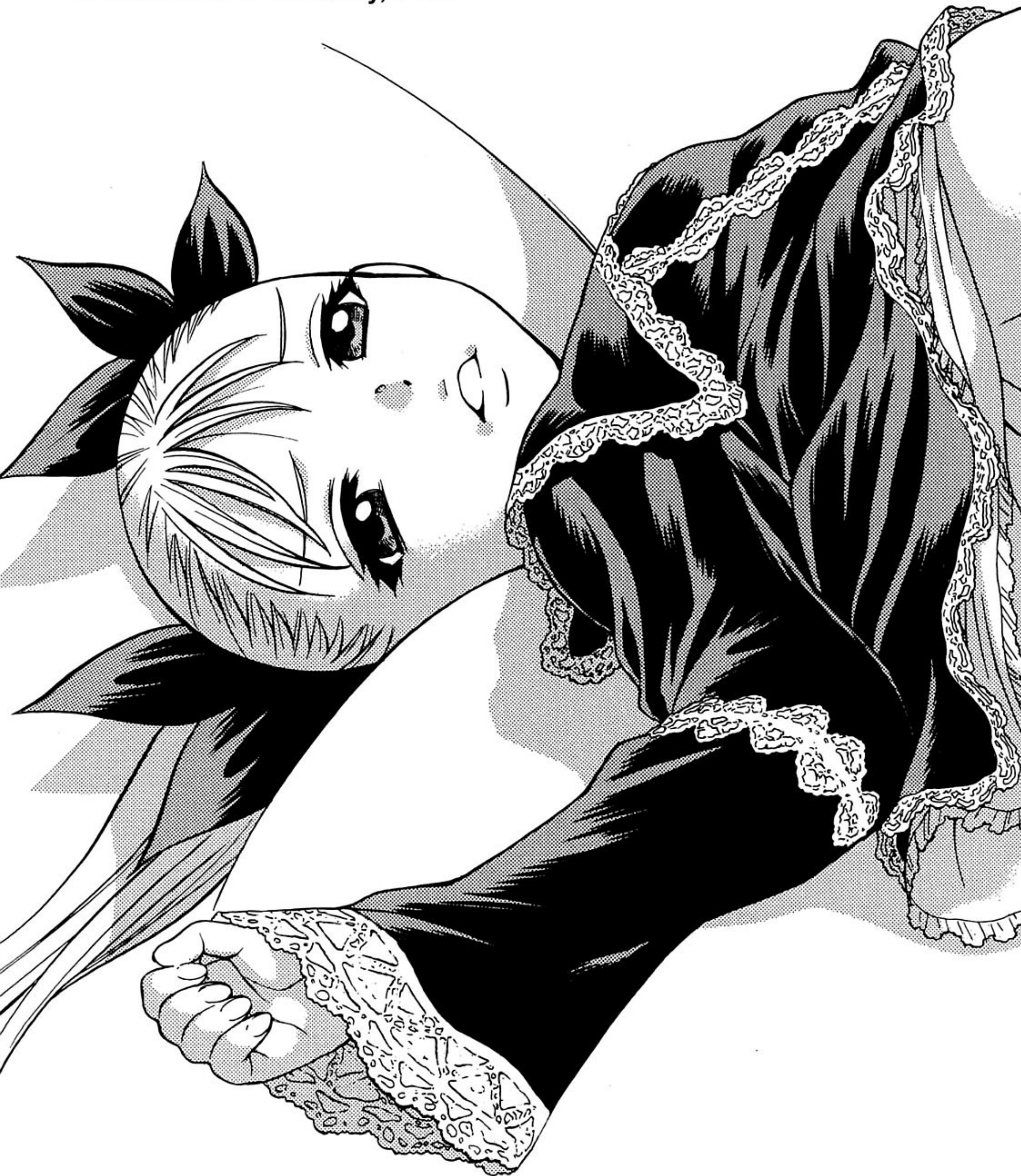
For guys my age, Werewolf
Akira's tiger girl will always
be Koyo (from *Wolf Guy*),
but I'm looking forward to
seeing her in action, too!

**CONGRATULATIONS
ON THE ANIME!!**

Congrats, Tama-chan! I heard you were going through a lot, so I'm thrilled this is happening for you! I feel like I'm a comedian who's watching his partner make it to the big leagues... thrilled, but a little sad (laugh). I can't wait for the first episode!

富士原時
2009.12
MASAYUKI FUJI

Last year at this time, I was really busy with all the work I had to do for the anime. I kept telling myself that by this year, I'd finally have the time for a relaxing year-end. But in some ways, this year has been even harder... especially in regards to certain youth laws. There's more I wanna say, but...



TAKE THIS!!

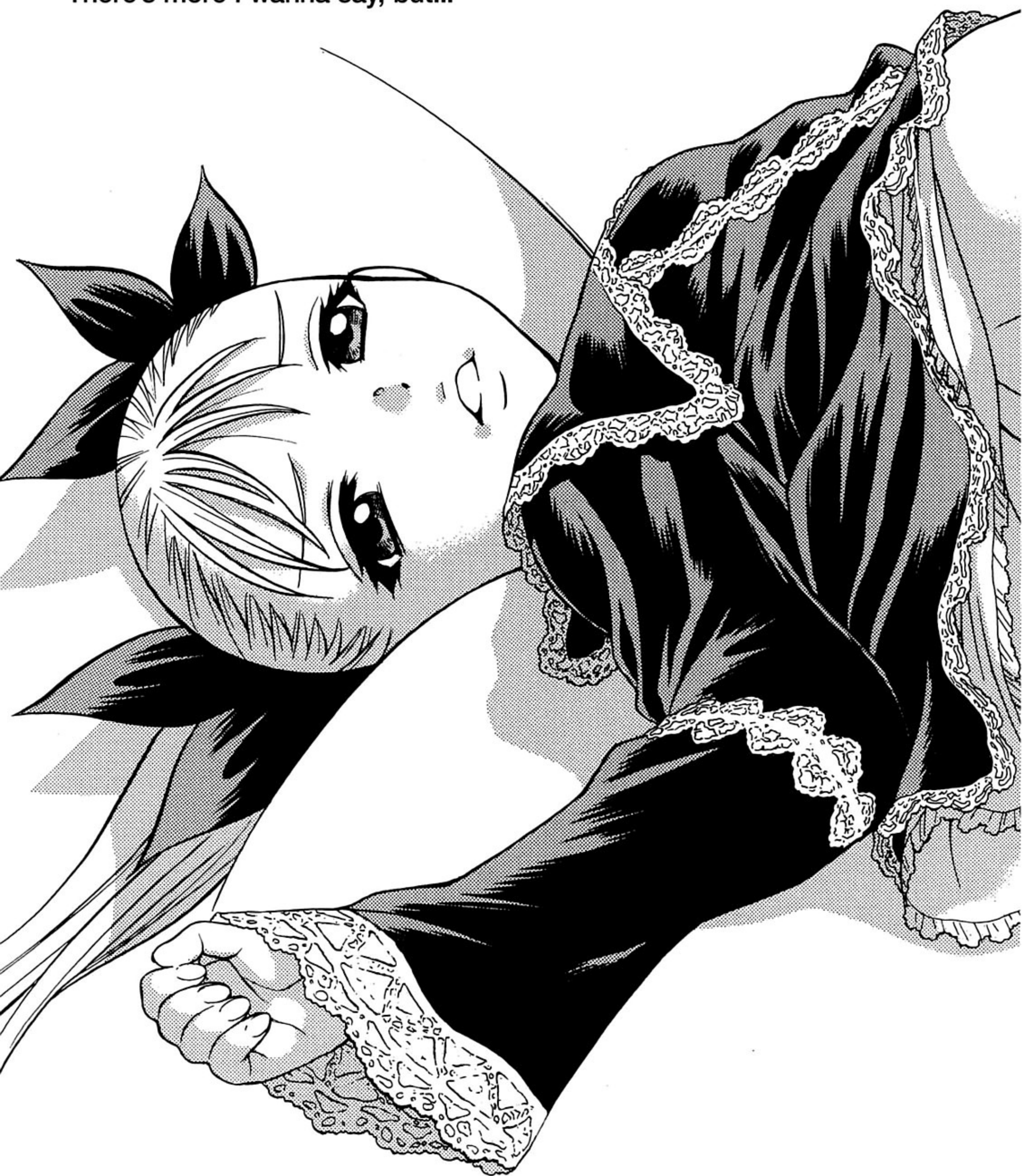
Ha ha! (laughs)



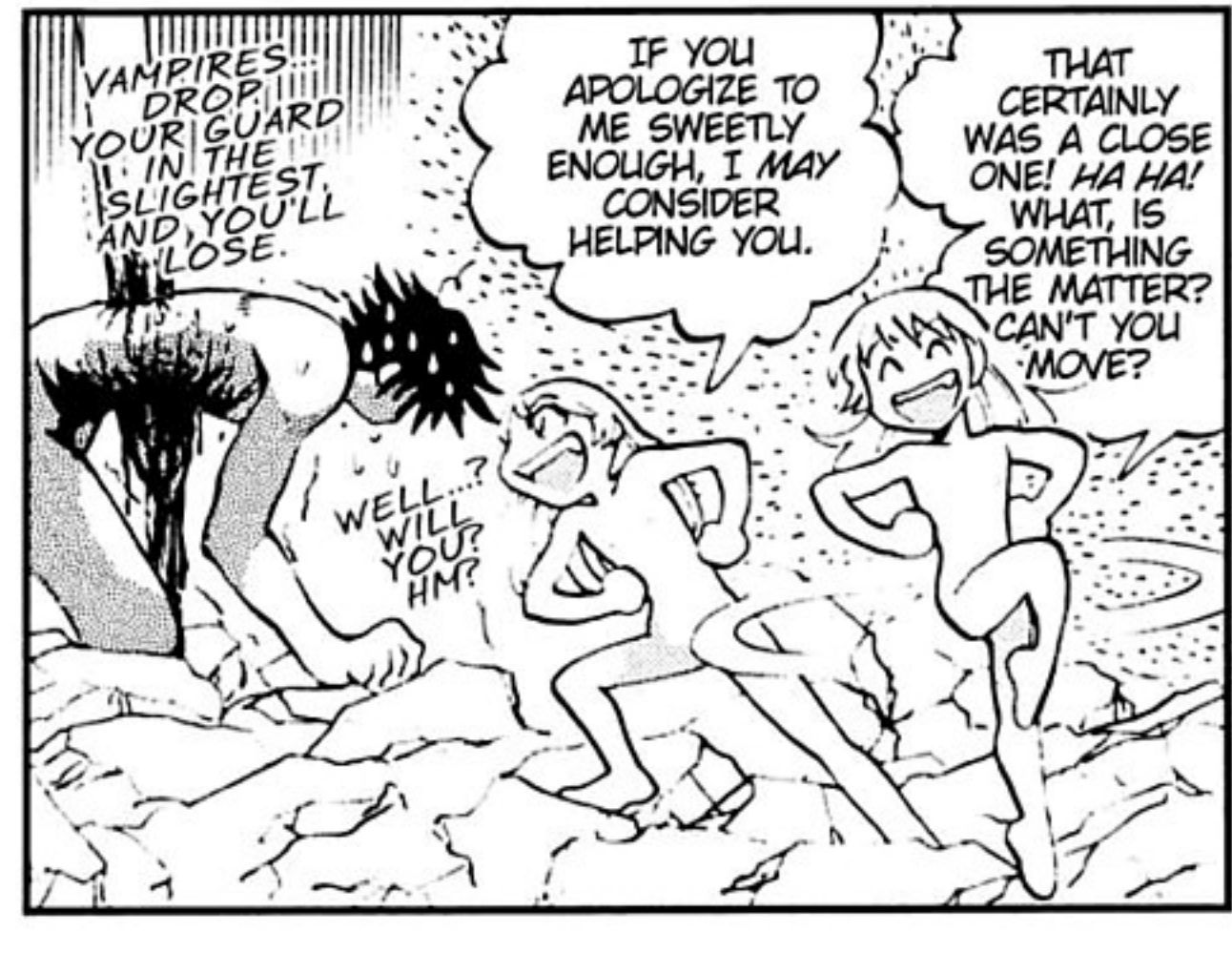
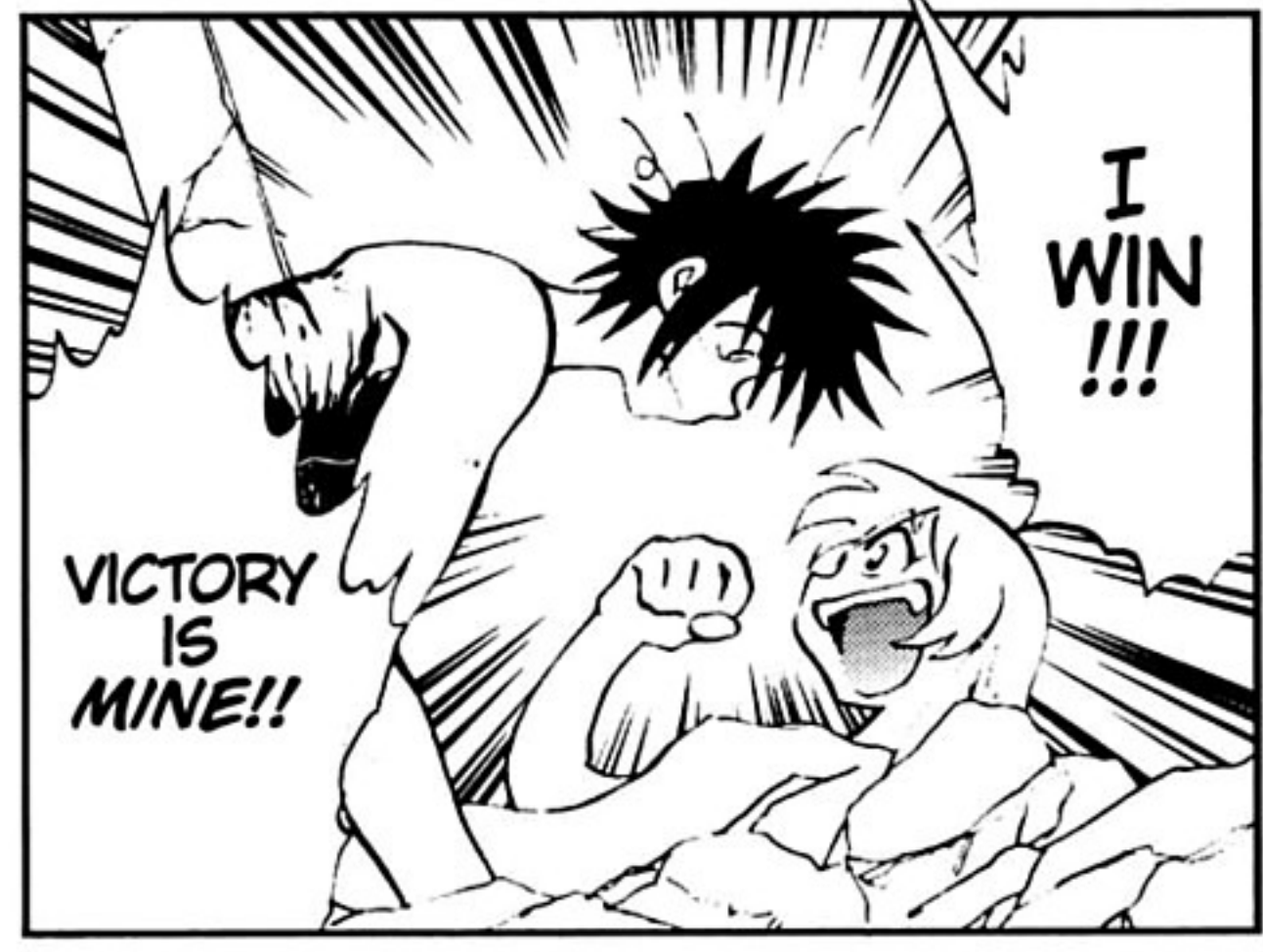
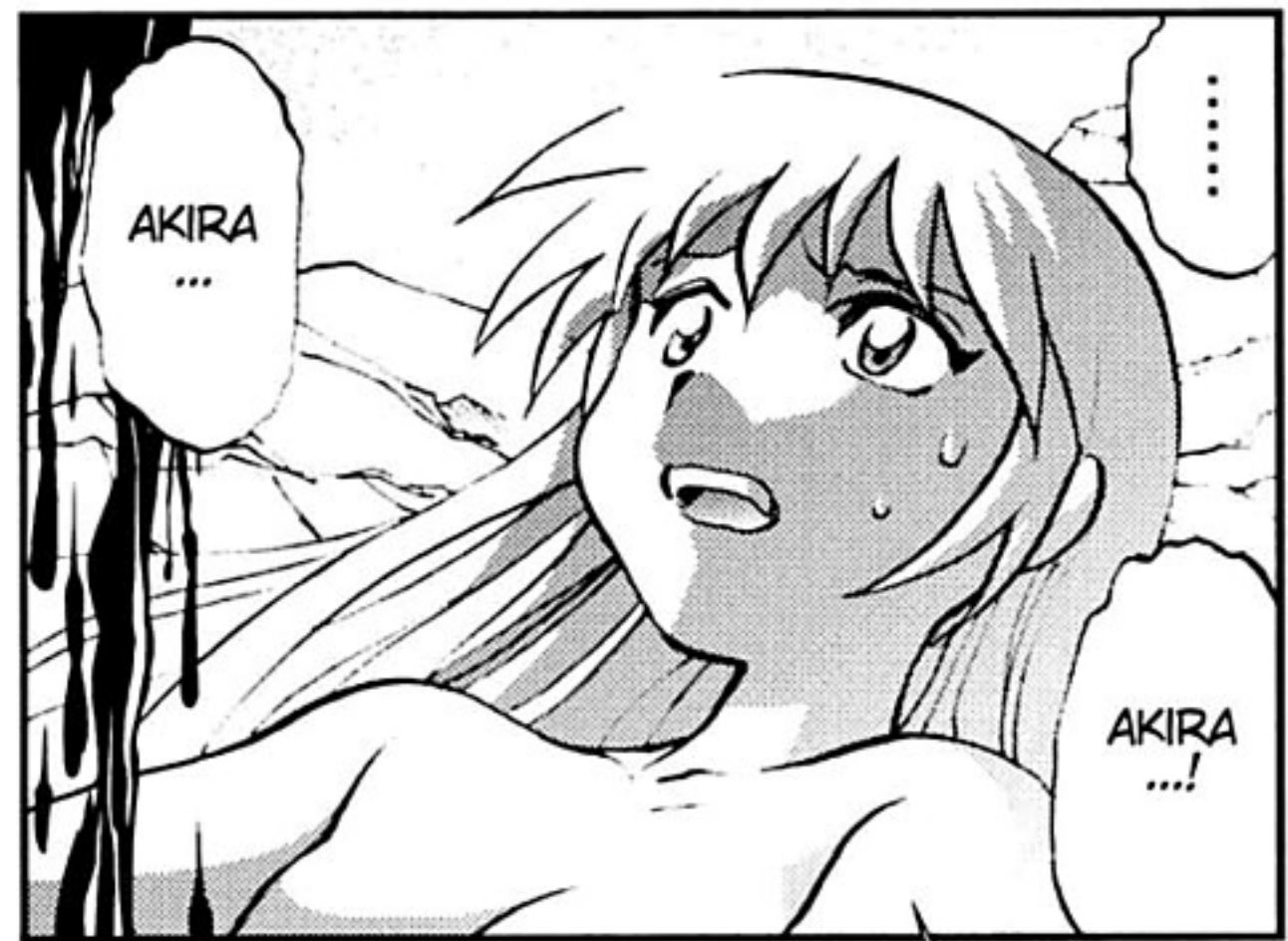
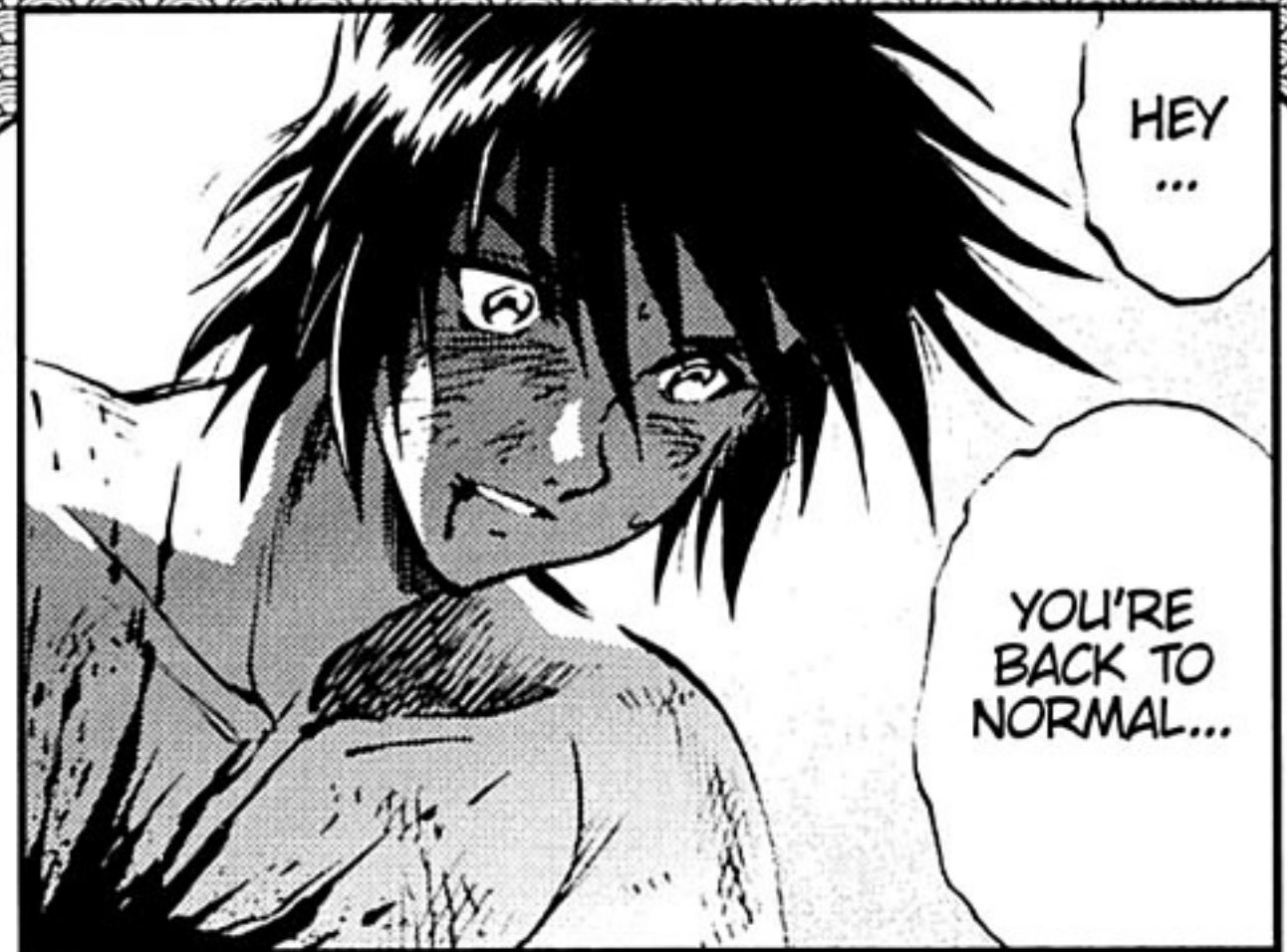
TAKE THIS!!

Ha ha! (laughs)

Last year at this time, I was really busy with all the work I had to do for the anime. I kept telling myself that by this year, I'd finally have the time for a relaxing year-end. But in some ways, this year has been even harder... especially in regards to certain youth laws. There's more I wanna say, but...



GOOD LUCK, AKIRA-KUN!!



POOR MEI REN PASSED AWAY TOO SOON. I HOPE TO HEAR OF HER BEING REVIVED AND BROUGHT BACK AS AN ALLY IN THE SECOND SEASON.

BUT WOULD THAT SATISFY YOU?

I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT HER MAJESTY WILL KEEP YOU CLOSE AND THINK OF YOU DEARLY, EVEN SHOULD YOU BE A RABBIT...

I TRANSFORM INTO A BUNNY, OF COURSE!

HI! I'M PETER-KUN, PART OF THE WERE-RABBIT DIVISION!

うん! BOING ン!

I WILL CARE FOR ALL OF YOU FOREVER!

OOH, HOW CUTE!

SNUGGLE

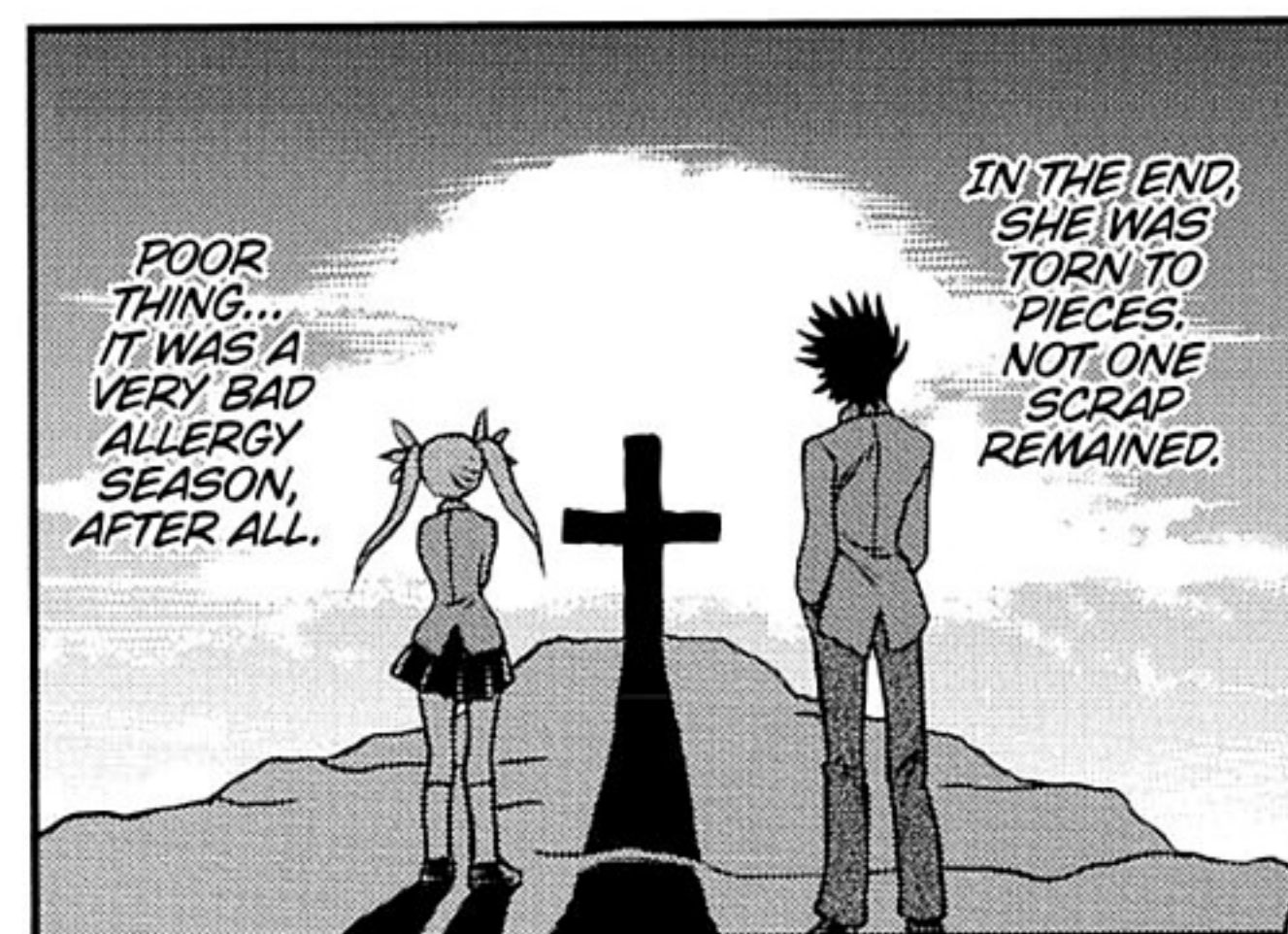
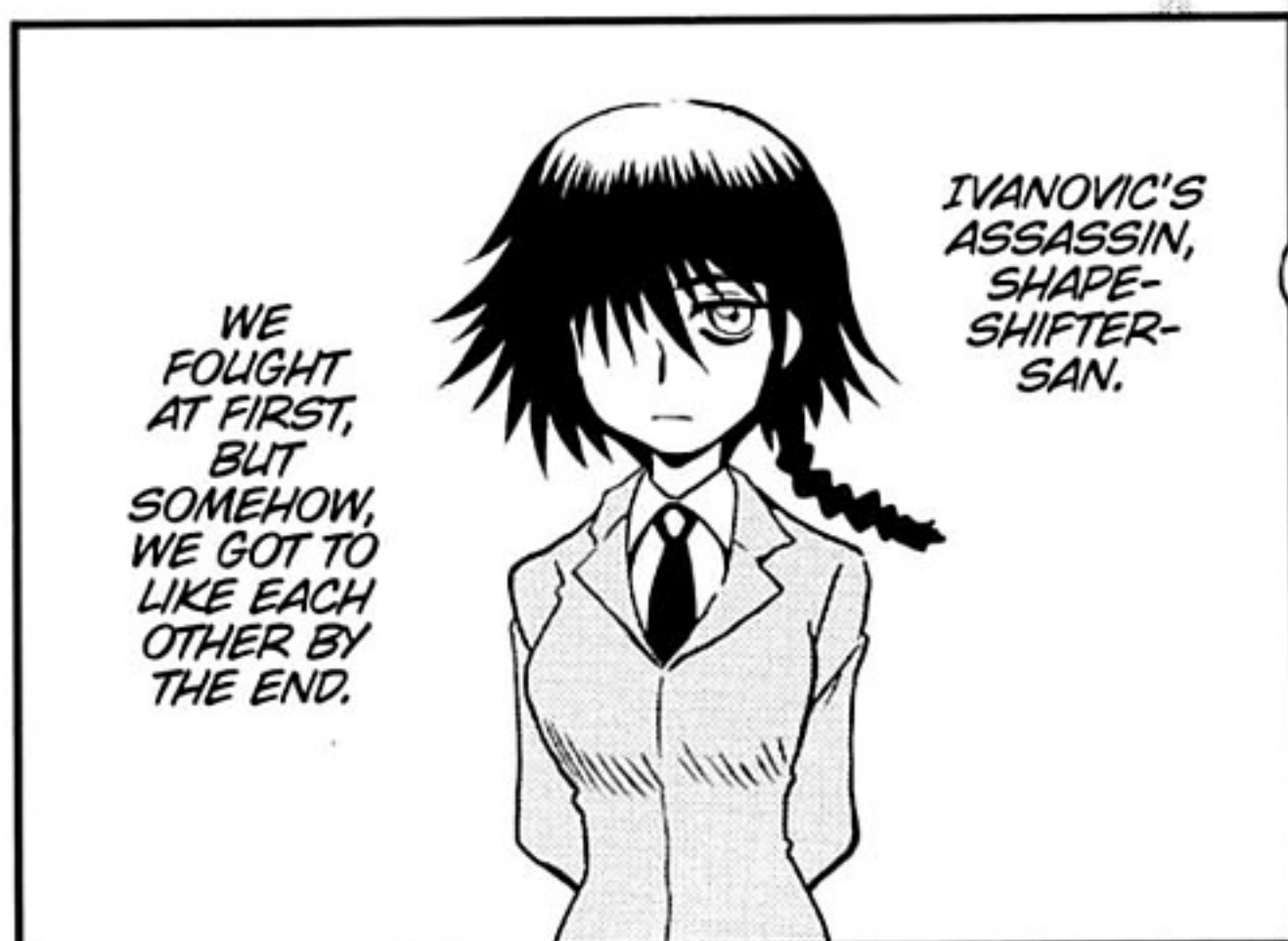
AAH! AND IS THAT A BABY WERE-PANDA?

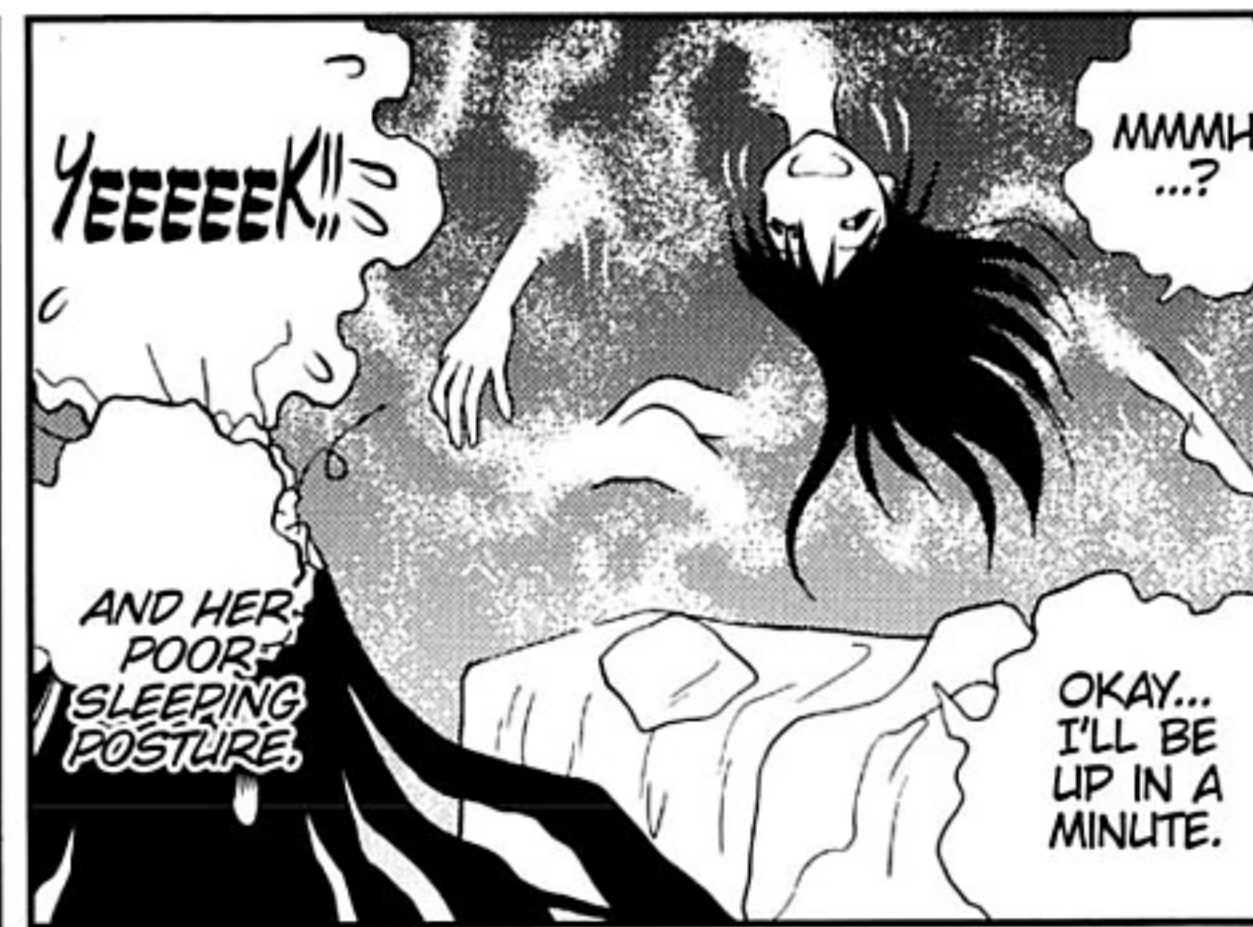
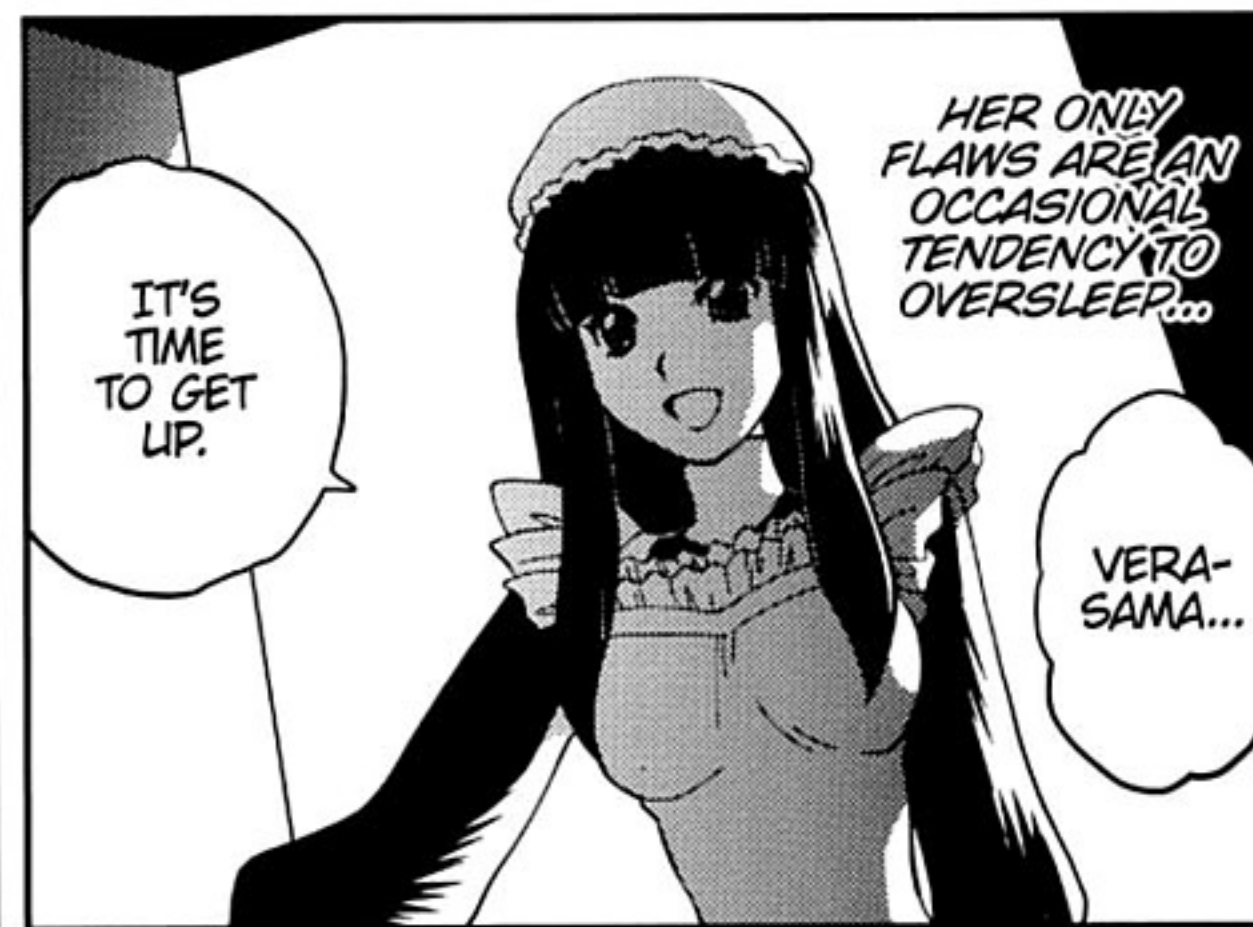
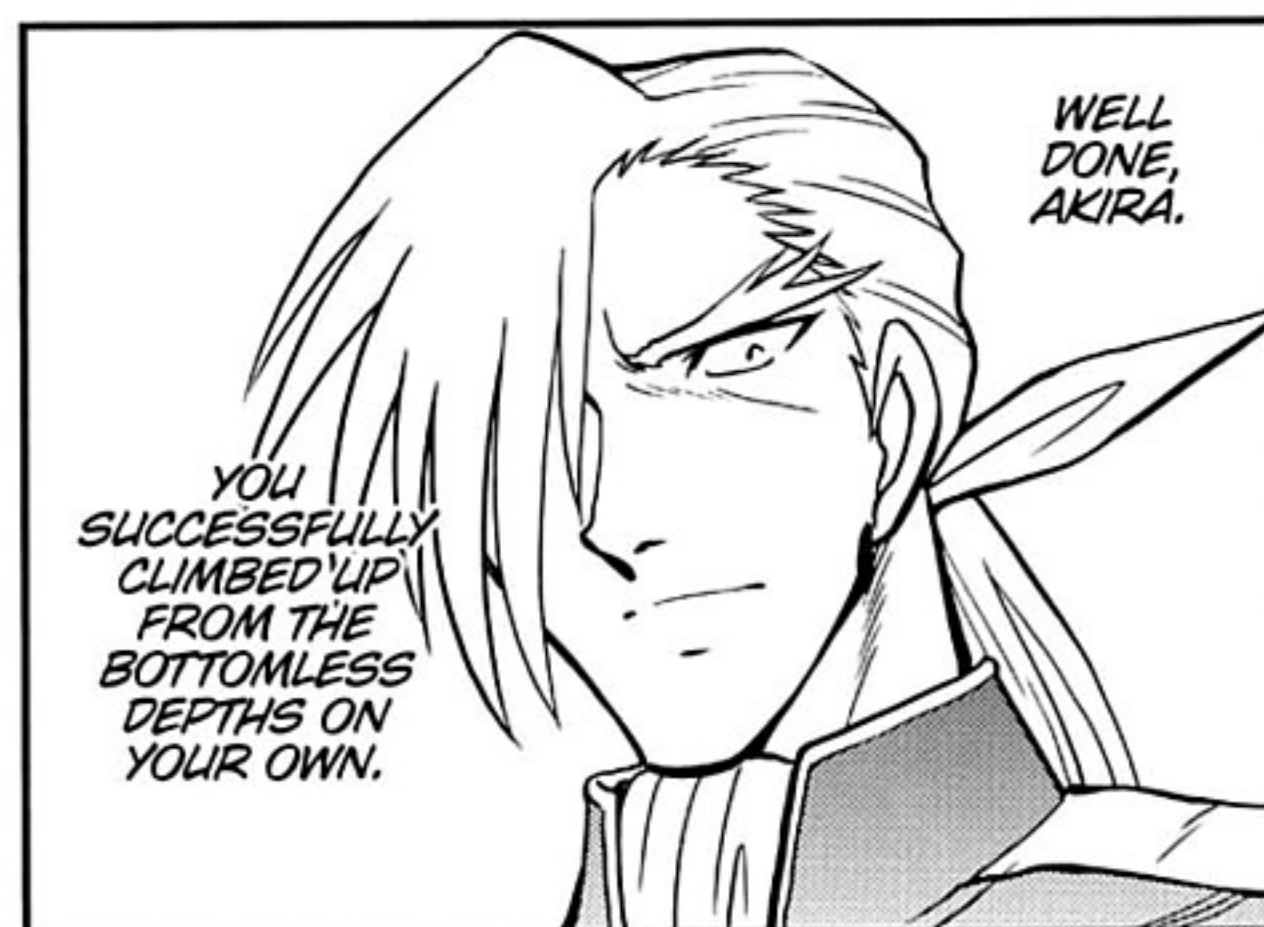
...ASK YOUR HEART.

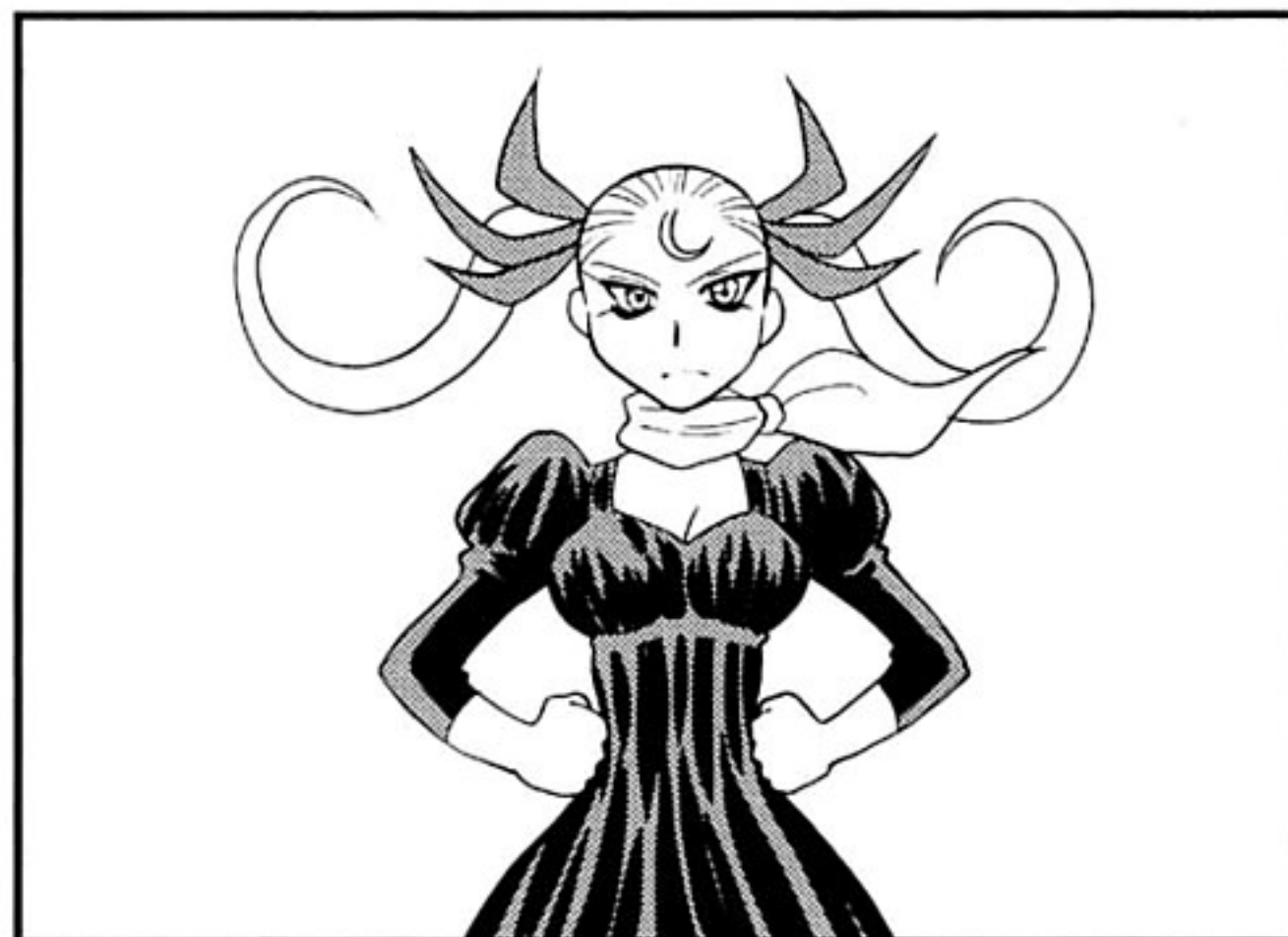
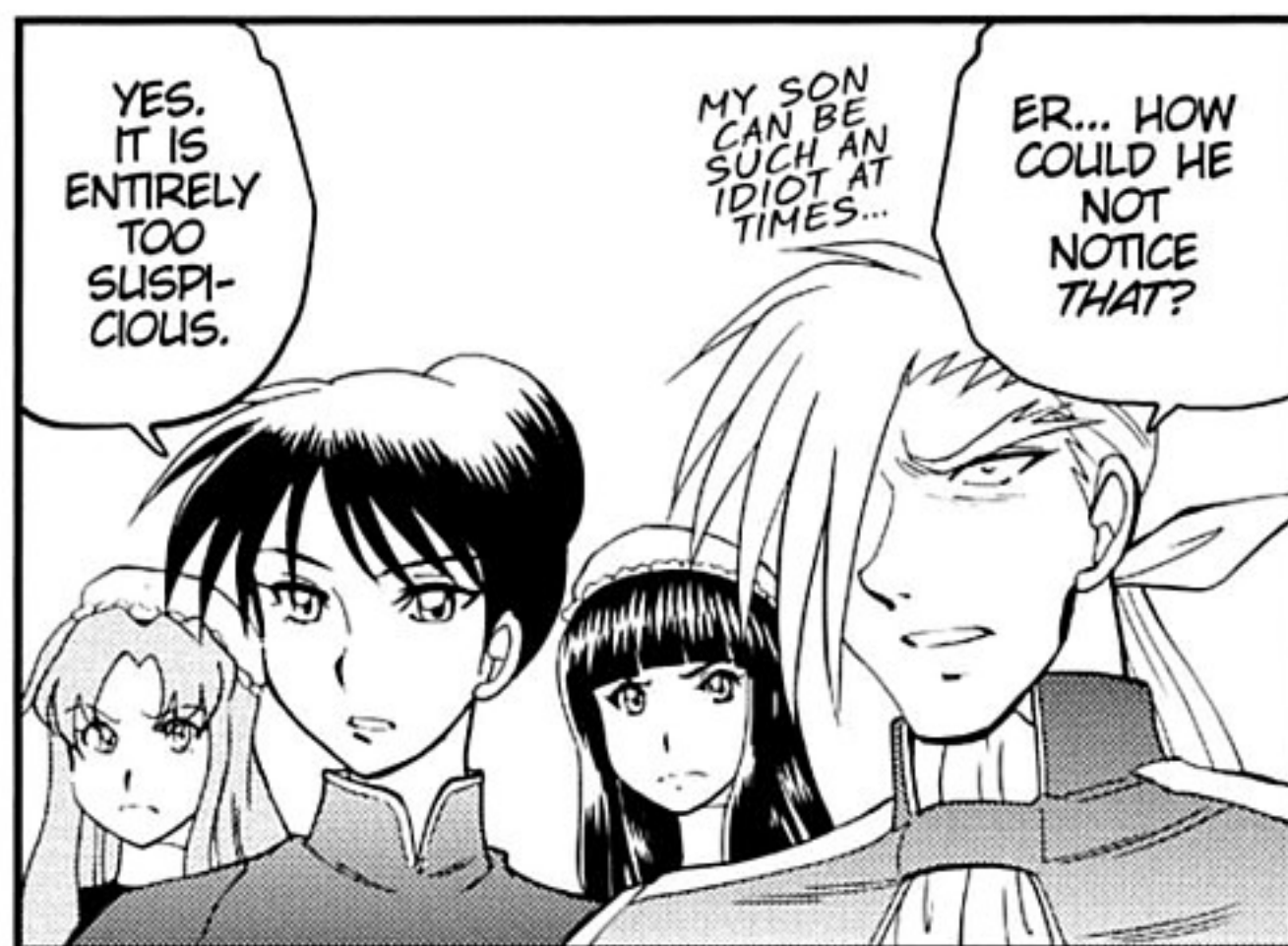
A PART OF ME IS THINKING THAT MIGHT NOT BE SO BAD AFTER ALL...

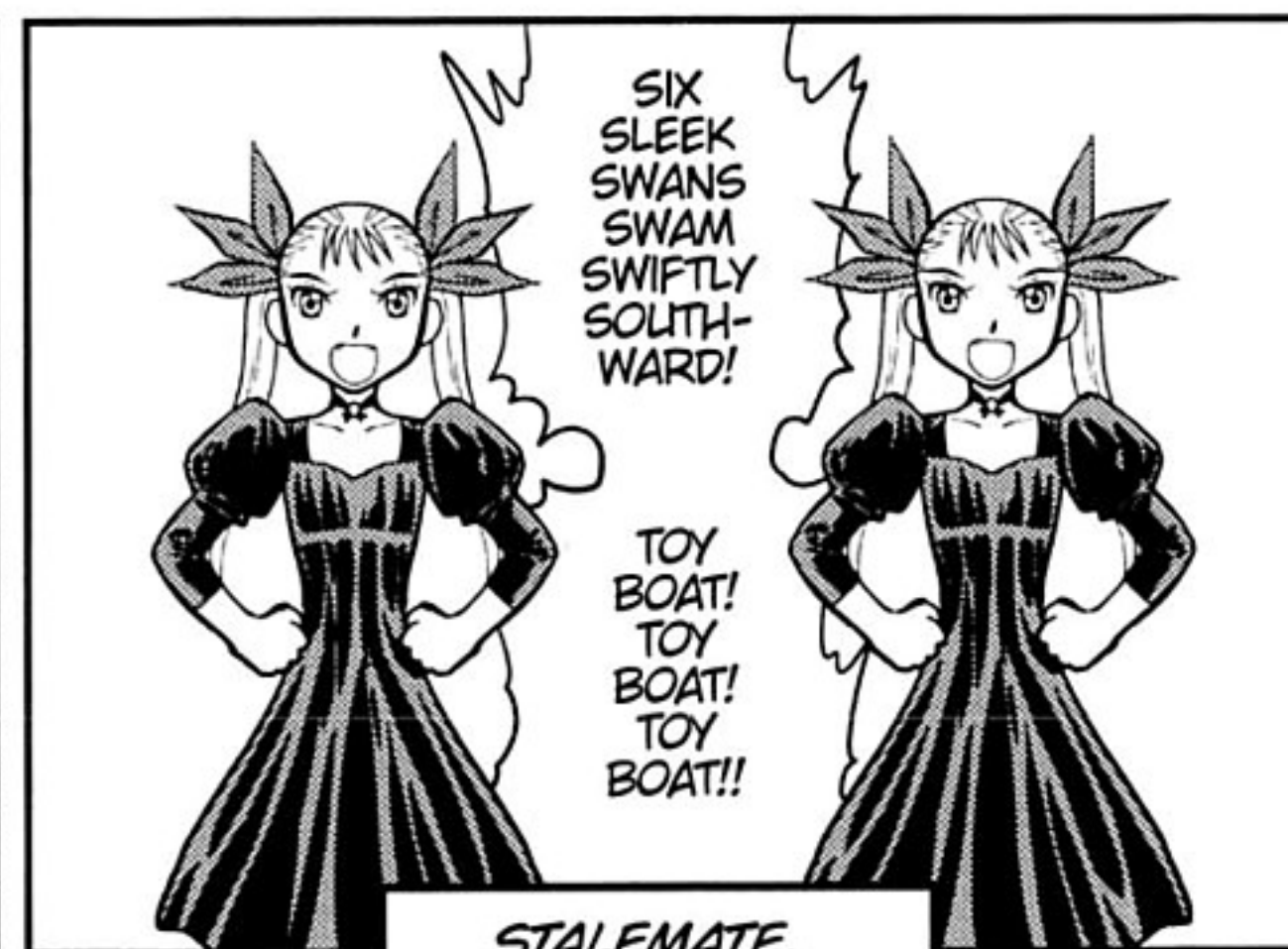
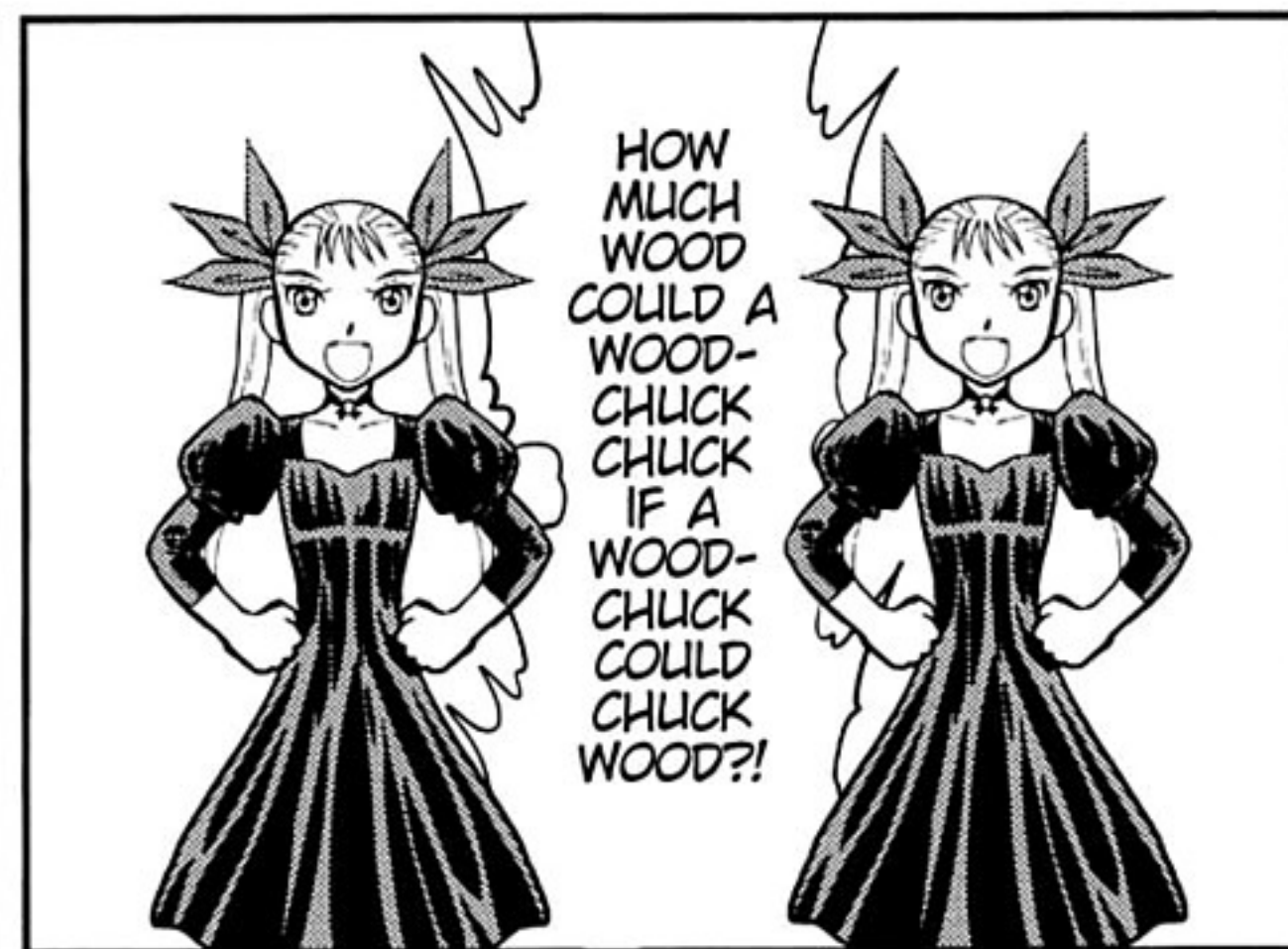
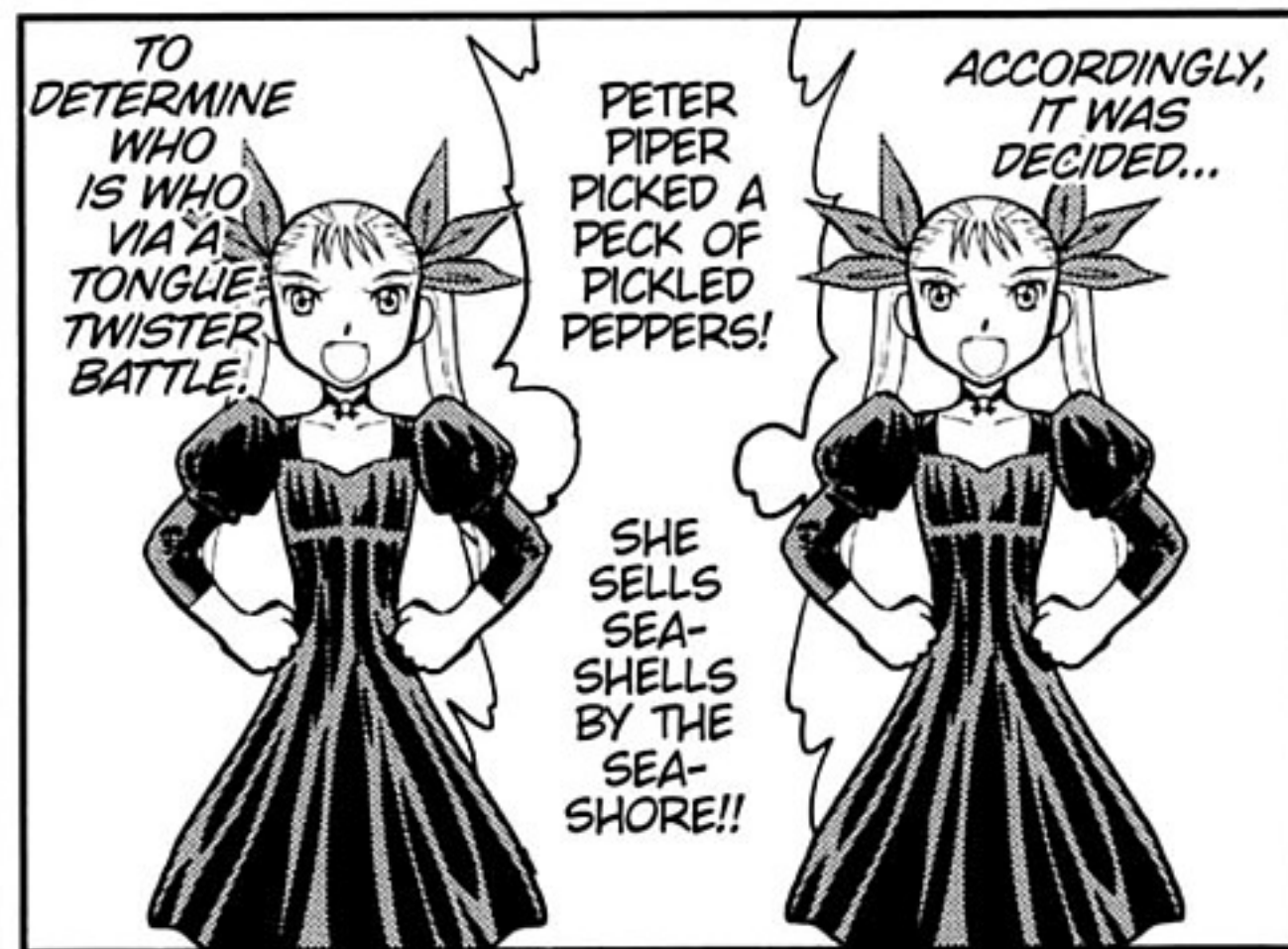
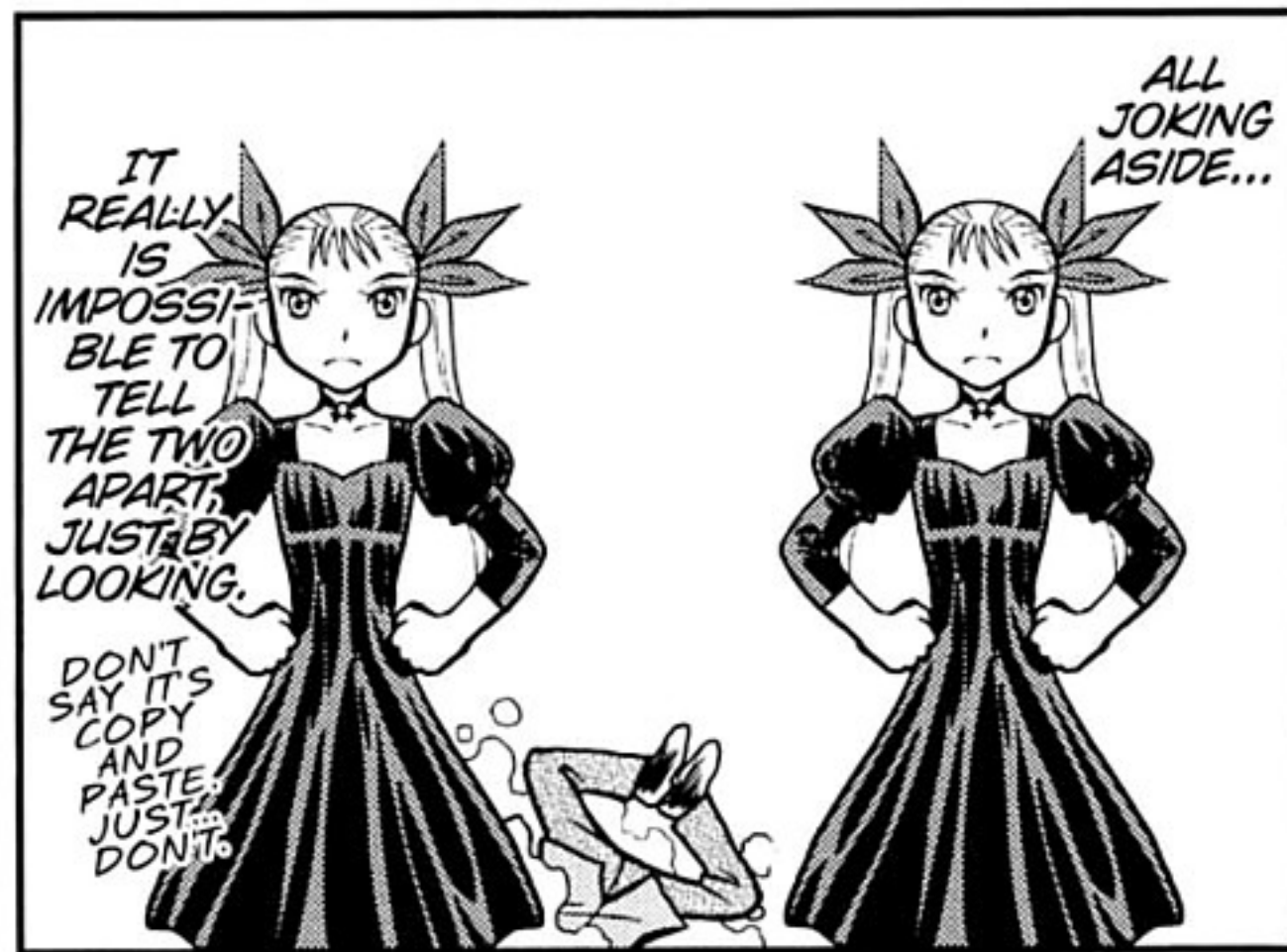
MASAYUKI FUJI
ふじまゆき
2010.4

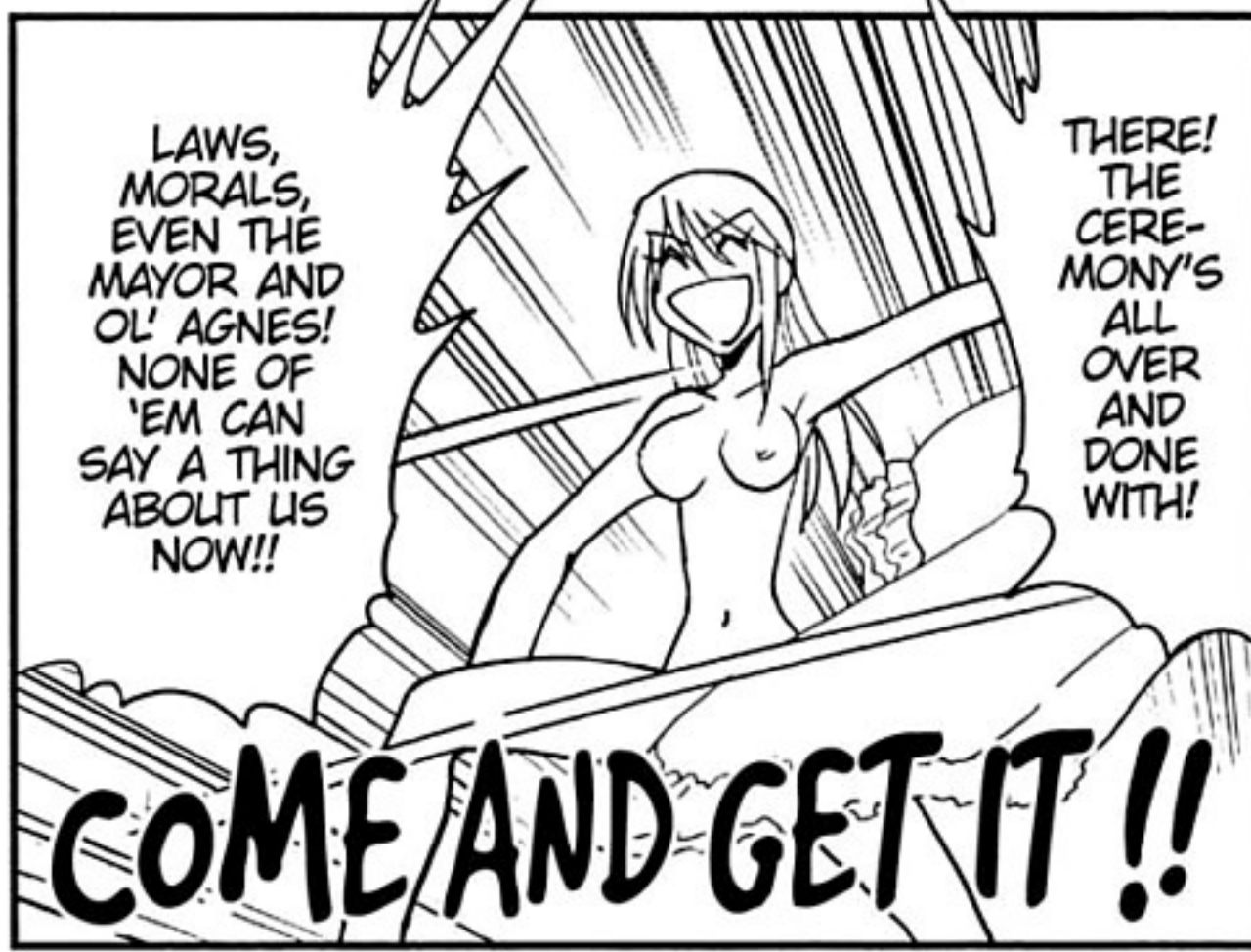
Uhm, I'm sorry! on so many levels!!







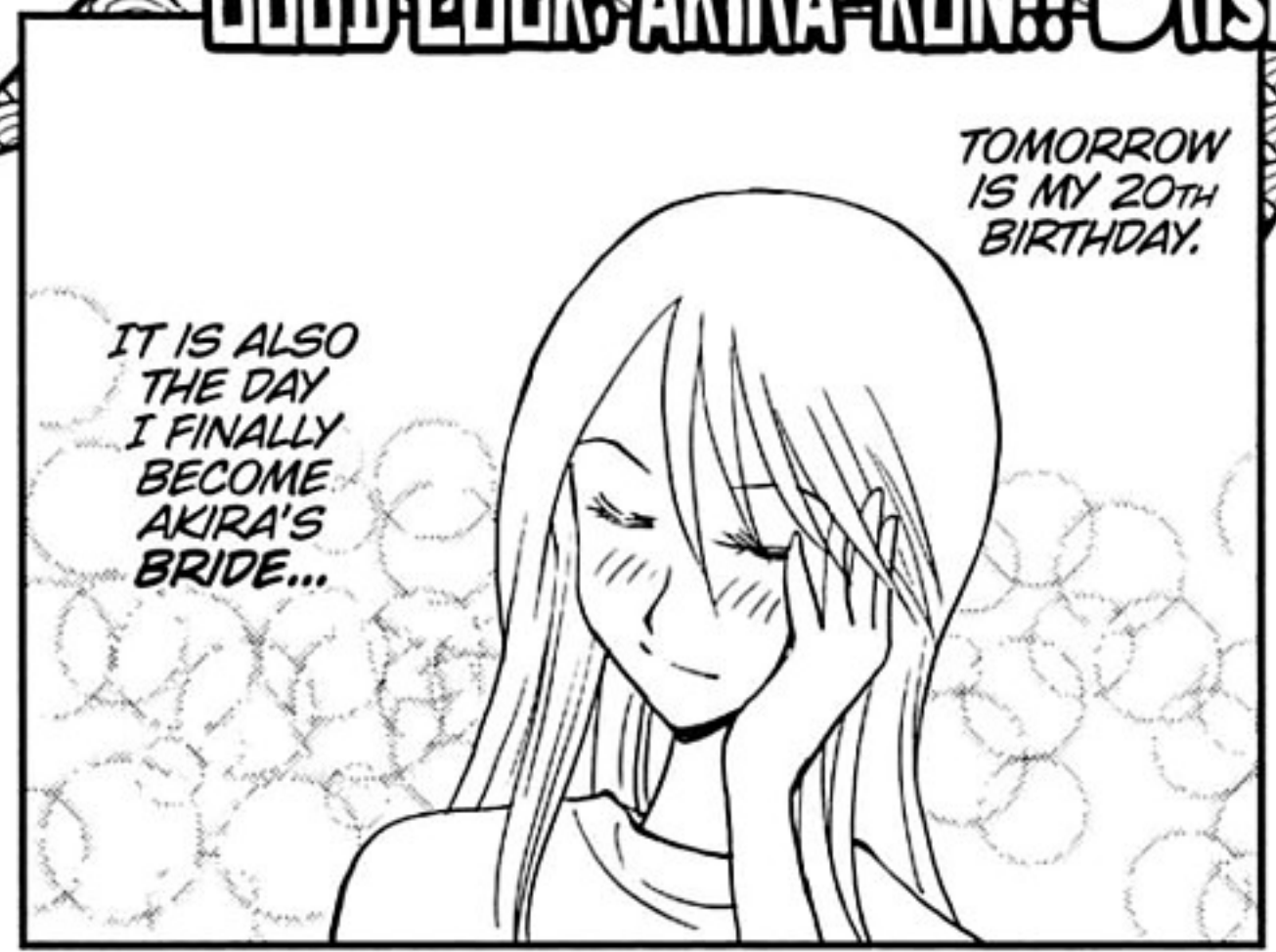




LAWS,
MORALS,
EVEN THE
MAYOR AND
OL' AGNES!
NONE OF
'EM CAN
SAY A THING
ABOUT US
NOW!!

THERE!
THE CER-
MONY'S
ALL OVER
AND DONE
WITH!

COME AND GET IT !!



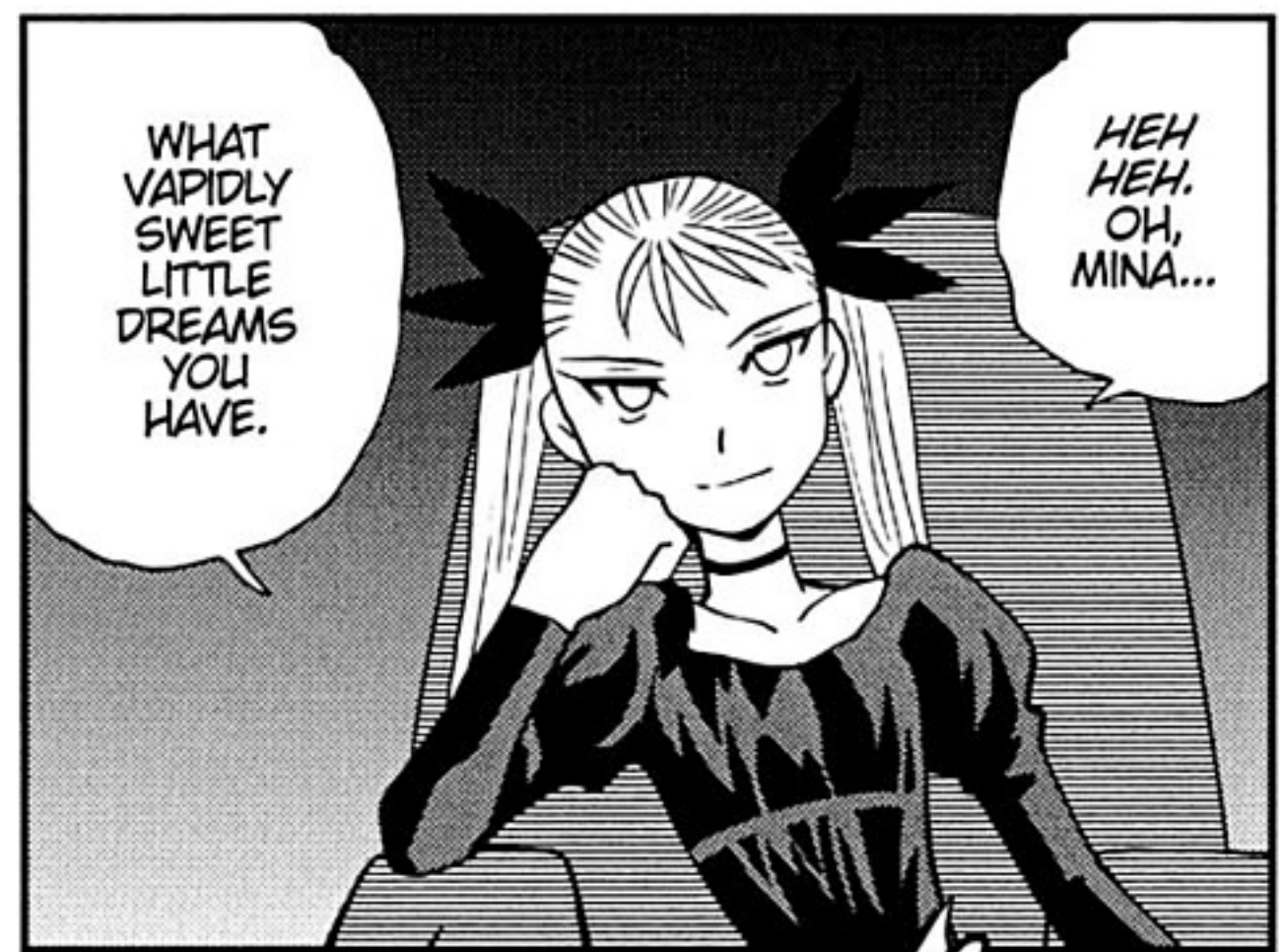
TOMORROW
IS MY 20TH
BIRTHDAY.

IT IS ALSO
THE DAY
I FINALLY
BECOME
AKIRA'S
BRIDE...



GET
READY,
'CUZ MY
LONELY
WOLF IS
ABOUT TA
BREATHE
FIRE!!

YES!
I'VE BEEN
WAITIN' MY
WHOLE
LIFE FOR
THIS,
MINA!



WHAT
VAPIDLY
SWEET
LITTLE
DREAMS
YOU HAVE.

HEH
HEH.
OH,
MINA...



OH YEAH!
MAN, MY BACK
CAN'T TAKE
MUCH MORE!

LINH! LINH!
YOU LIKE THAT?
LINH! LINH!
LINH! TELL ME
YA LIKE THAT!

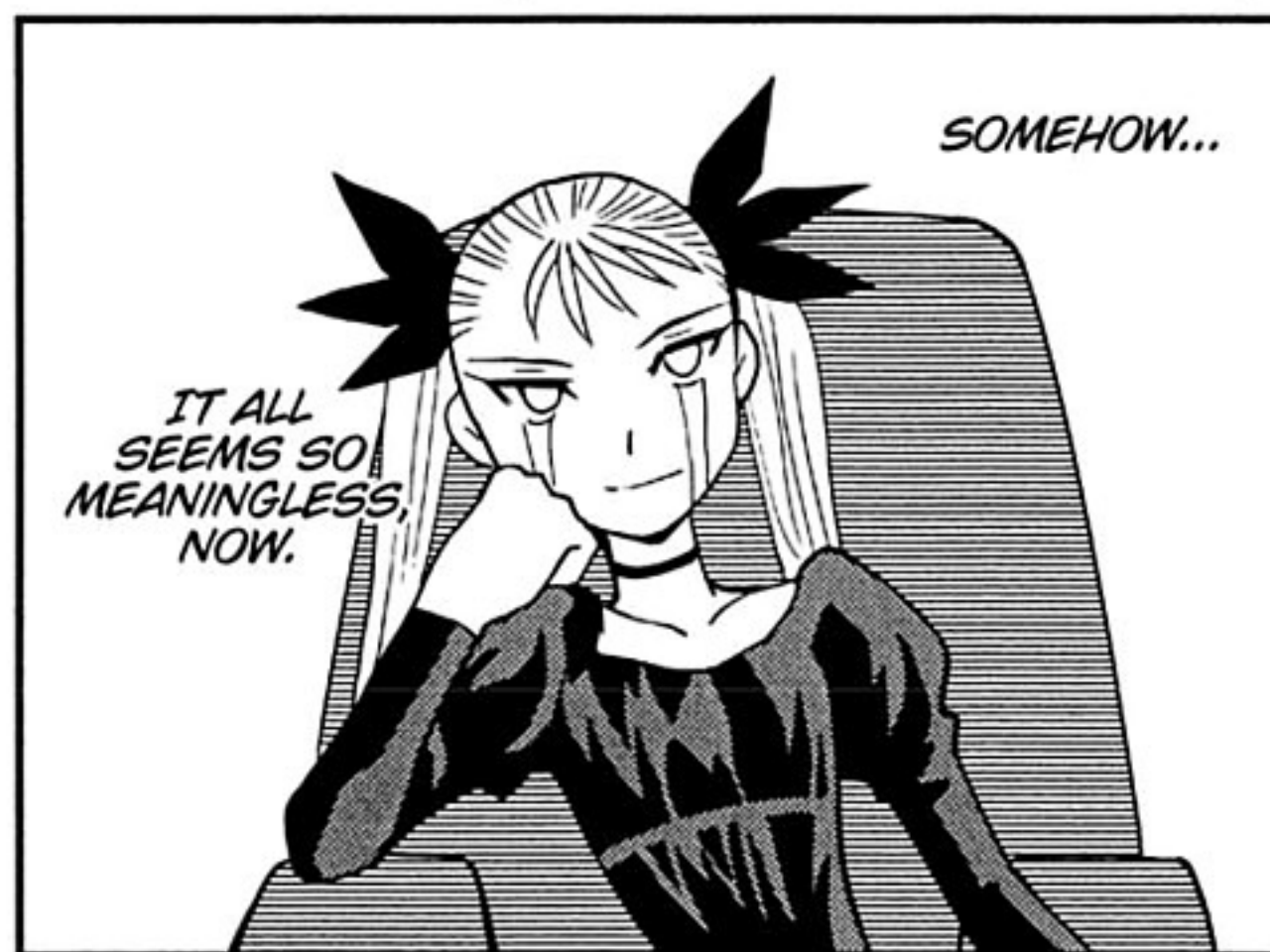
AHN!
YES!
YEEESS!
SO GOOD!
YOU'RE
THE BEST!



DWAH?!

YOU!!

I SEE
YOU
WATCHING
ME!!



SOMEHOW...

IT ALL
SEEMS SO
MEANINGLESS,
NOW.



D-
DAMMIT!

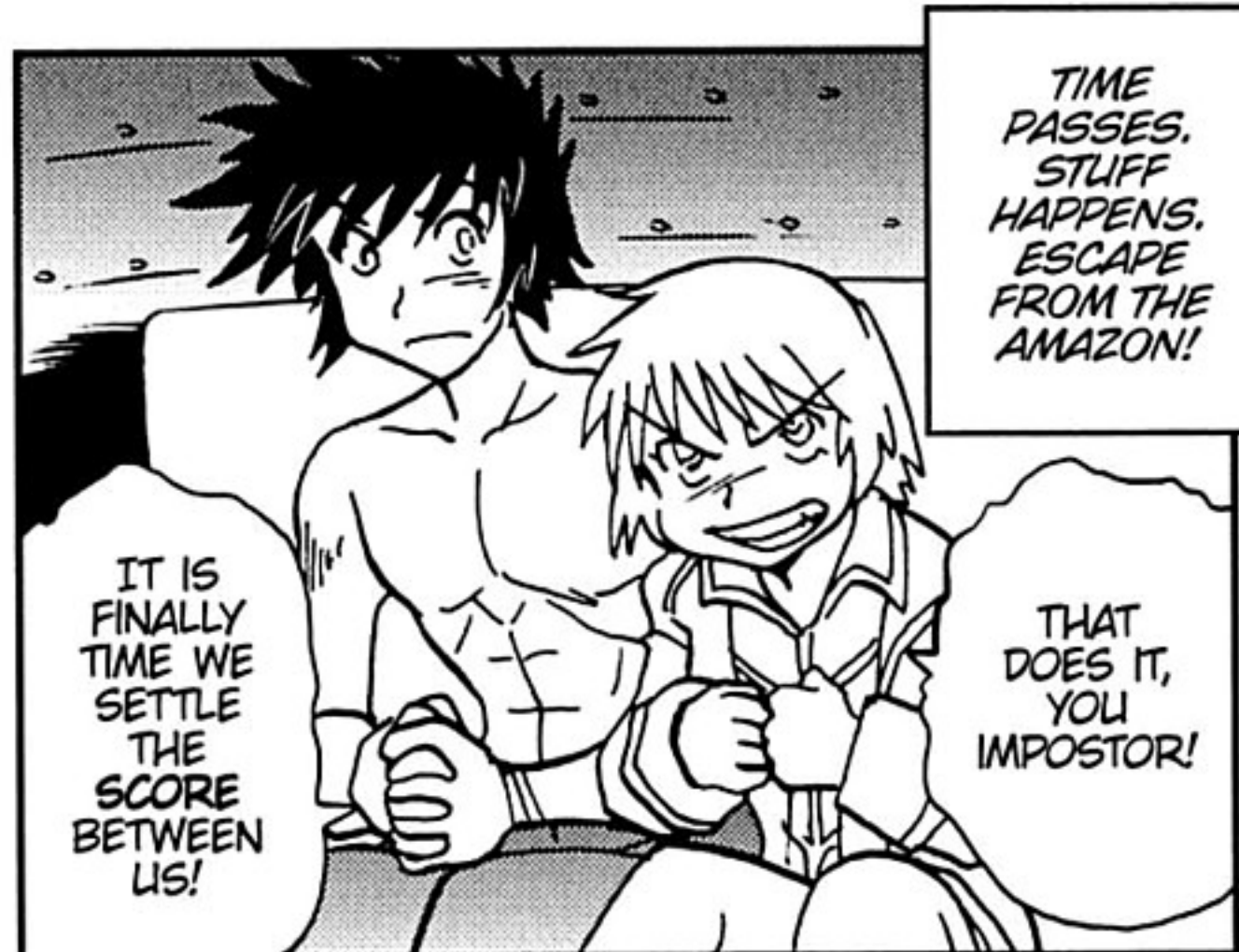
LIH, YOU ARE
READY FOR
TOMORROW,
RIGHT?

HA HA!
ISN'T THAT
AWESOME
?!

DON'T
STARTLE
ME LIKE
THAT!

DIO-SAMA
HAS THE
COOLEST
LINES.

congrats on your marriage, Tama-chan!



TIME
PASSES.
STUFF
HAPPENS.
ESCAPE
FROM THE
AMAZON!

IT IS
FINALLY
TIME WE
SETTLE
THE
SCORE
BETWEEN
US!

THAT
DOES IT,
YOU
IMPOSTOR!

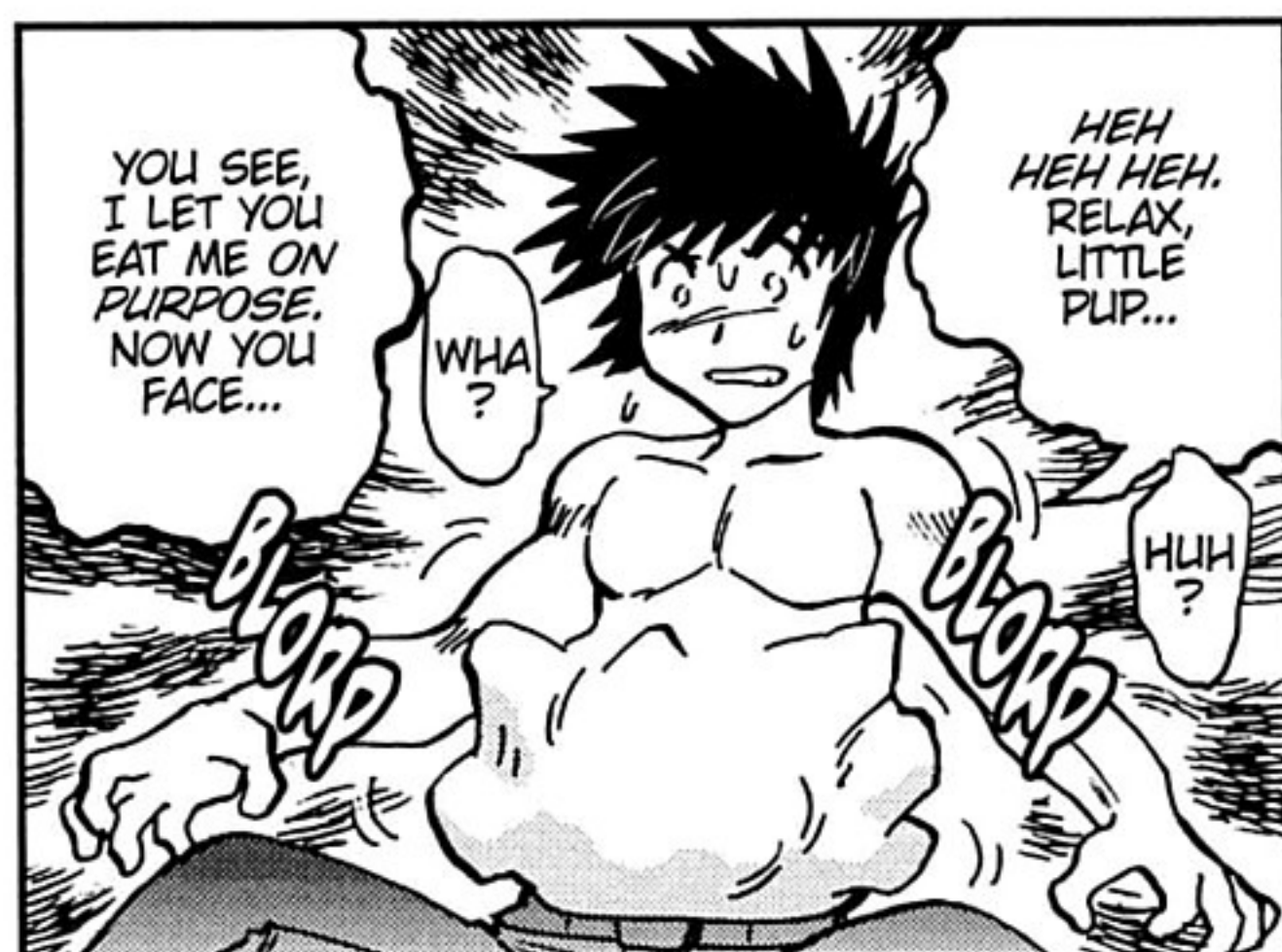


WHO
DO YOU
THINK
YOU ARE
TALKING
TO?!



I HAVEN'T
DROPPED
A DEUCE
SINCE THEN,
EITHER.
IF I POINT
AT IT AND SAY,
"THERE SHE IS!"
NEXT TIME I DO,
WILL HIME-SAN
ACCEPT THAT?

OH CRAP!
I ATE THE
IMPOSTOR!

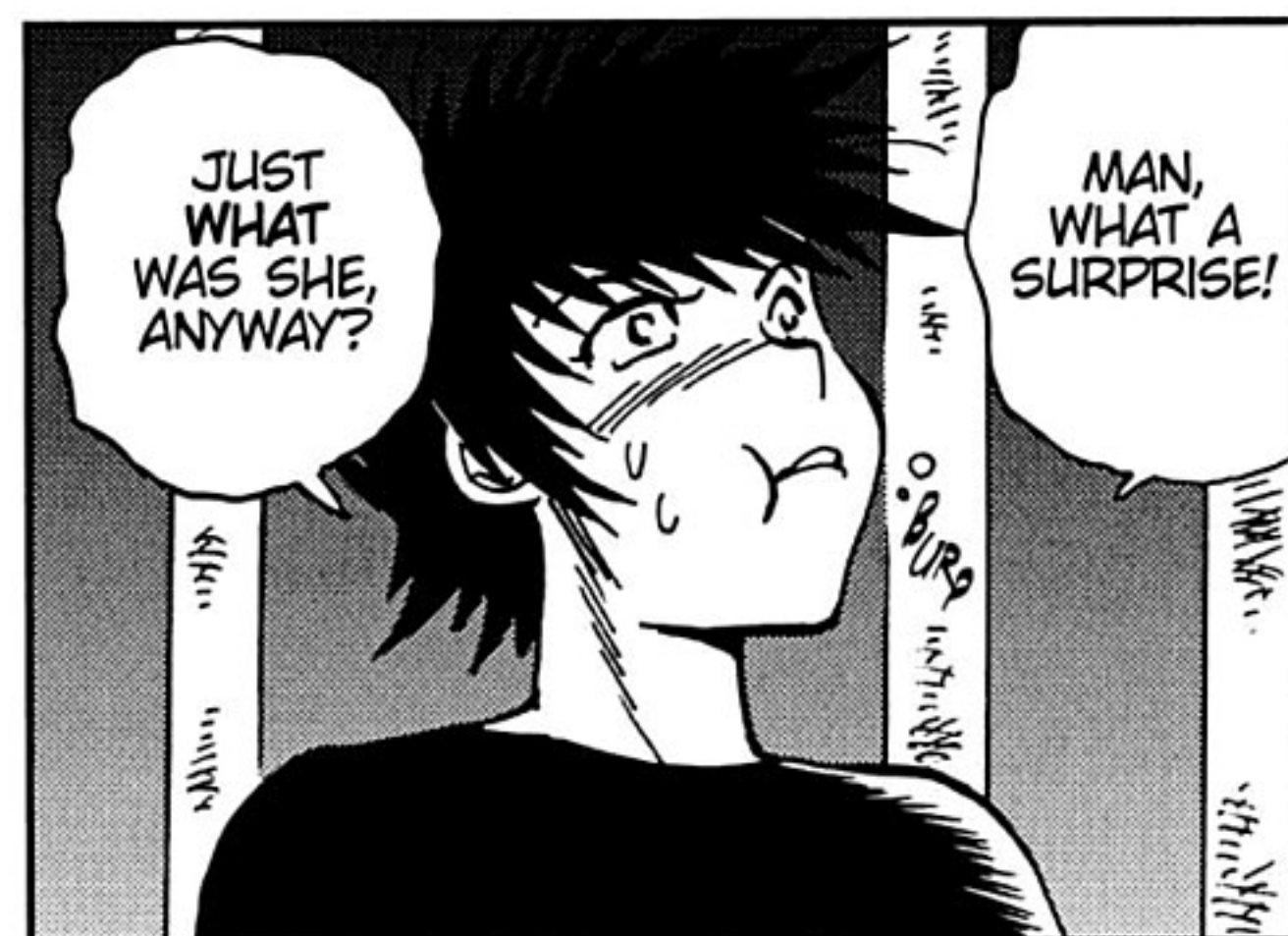


YOU SEE,
I LET YOU
EAT ME ON
PURPOSE.
NOW YOU
FACE...

WHA?

HEH
HEH HEH.
RELAX,
LITTLE
PUP...

HUH?



JUST
WHAT
WAS SHE,
ANYWAY?

MAN,
WHAT A
SURPRISE!



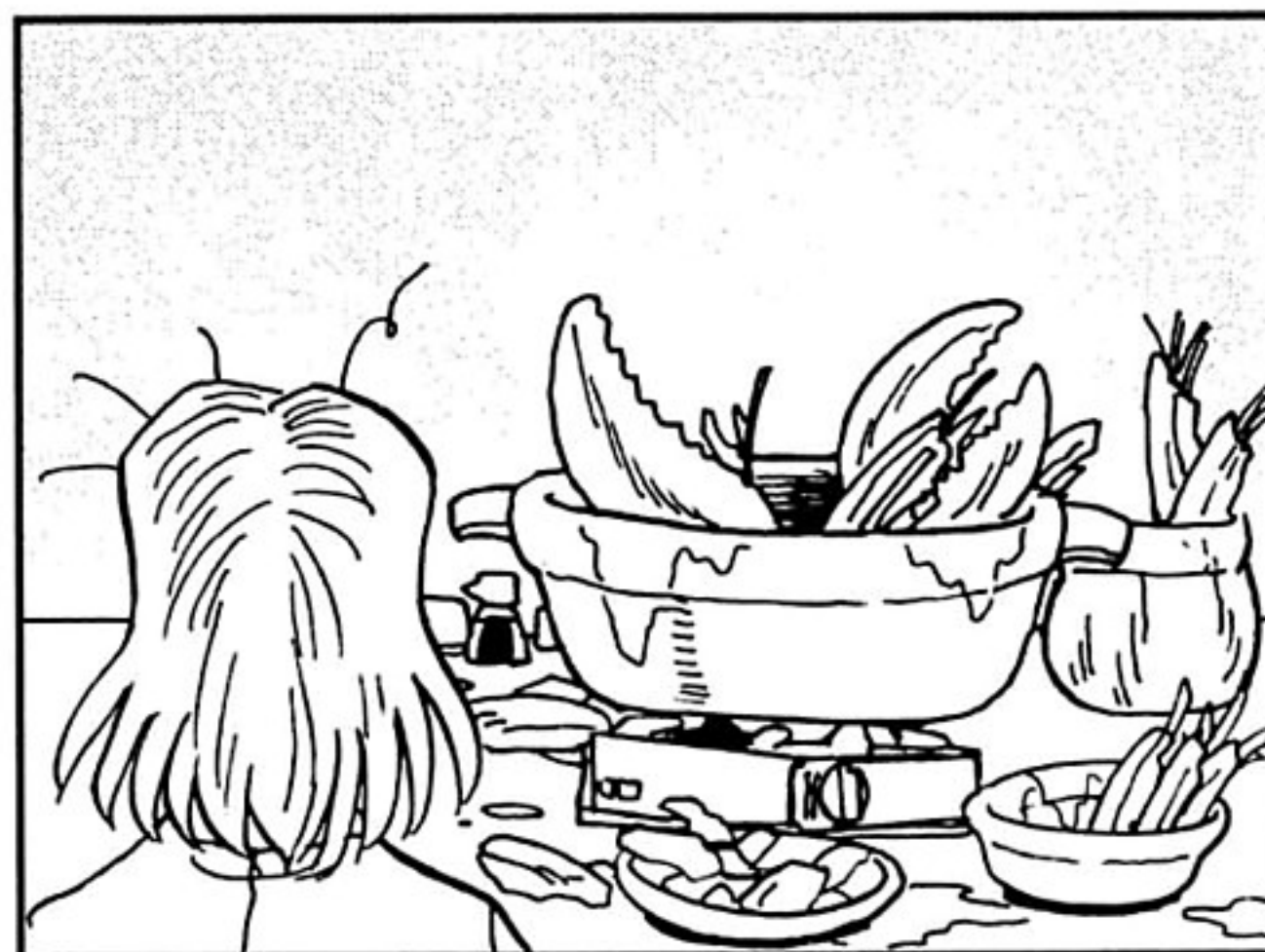
FIGHT
ME,
MINA!

THE
WOLF-
CRAB!!

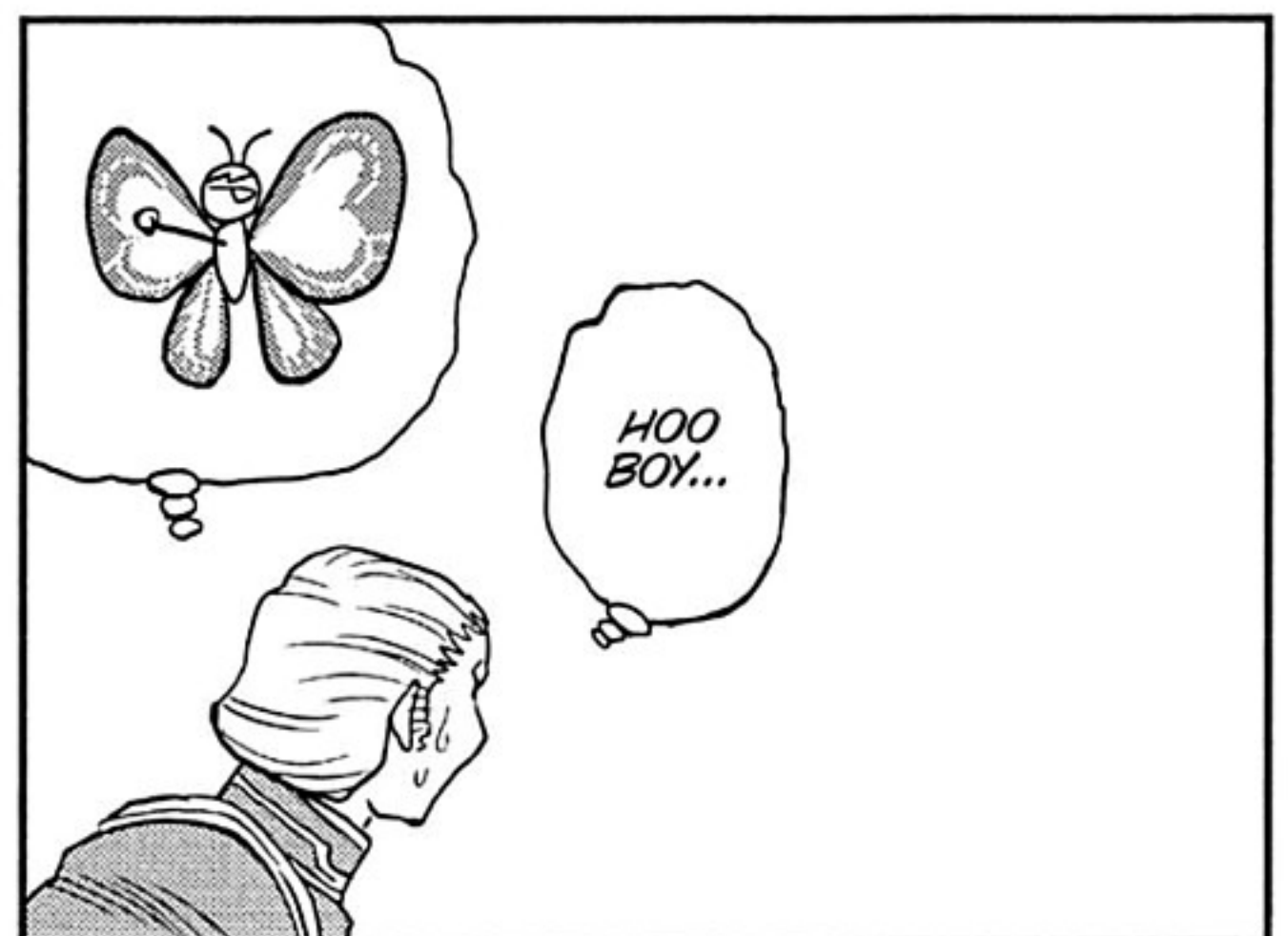
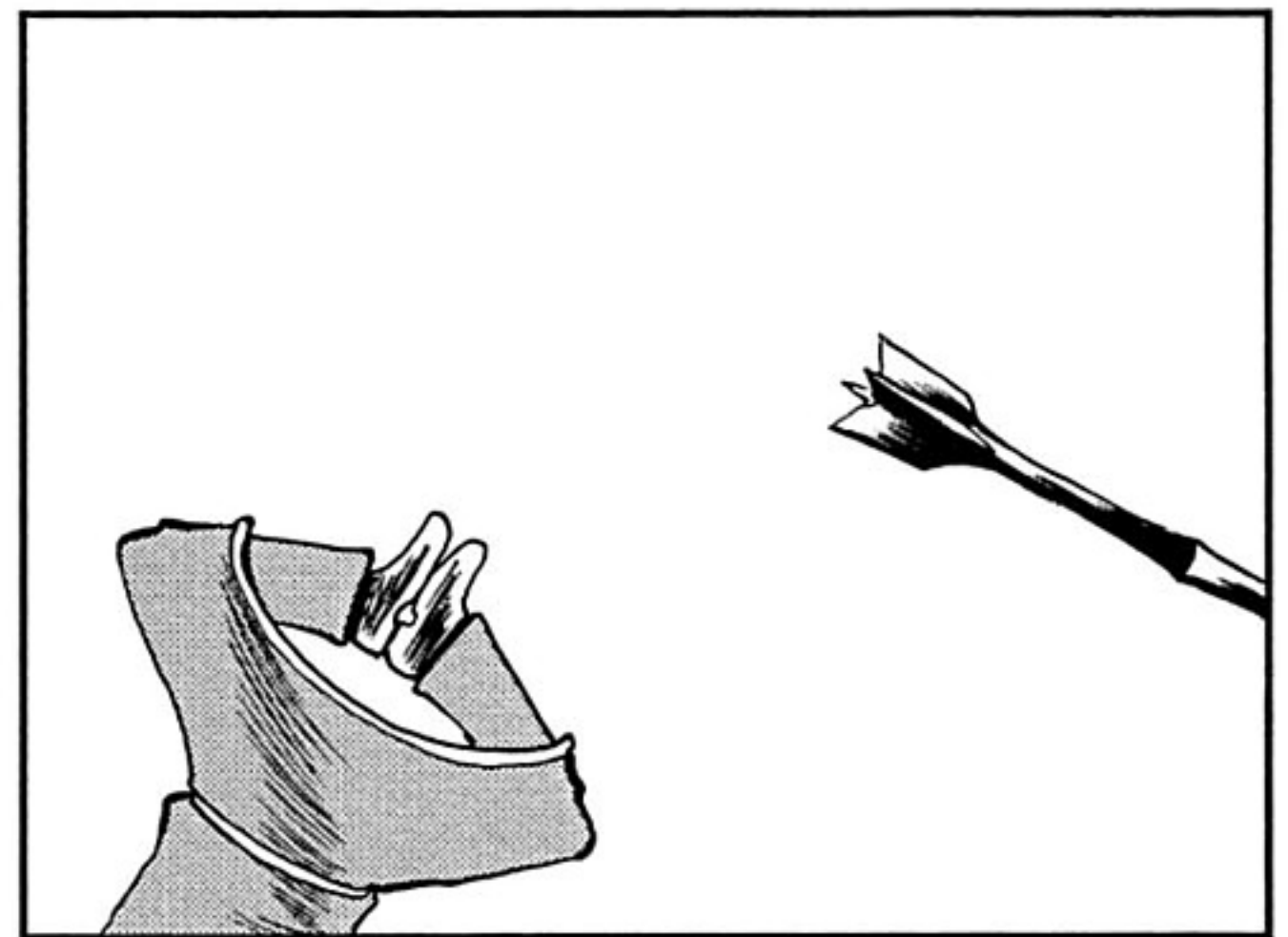
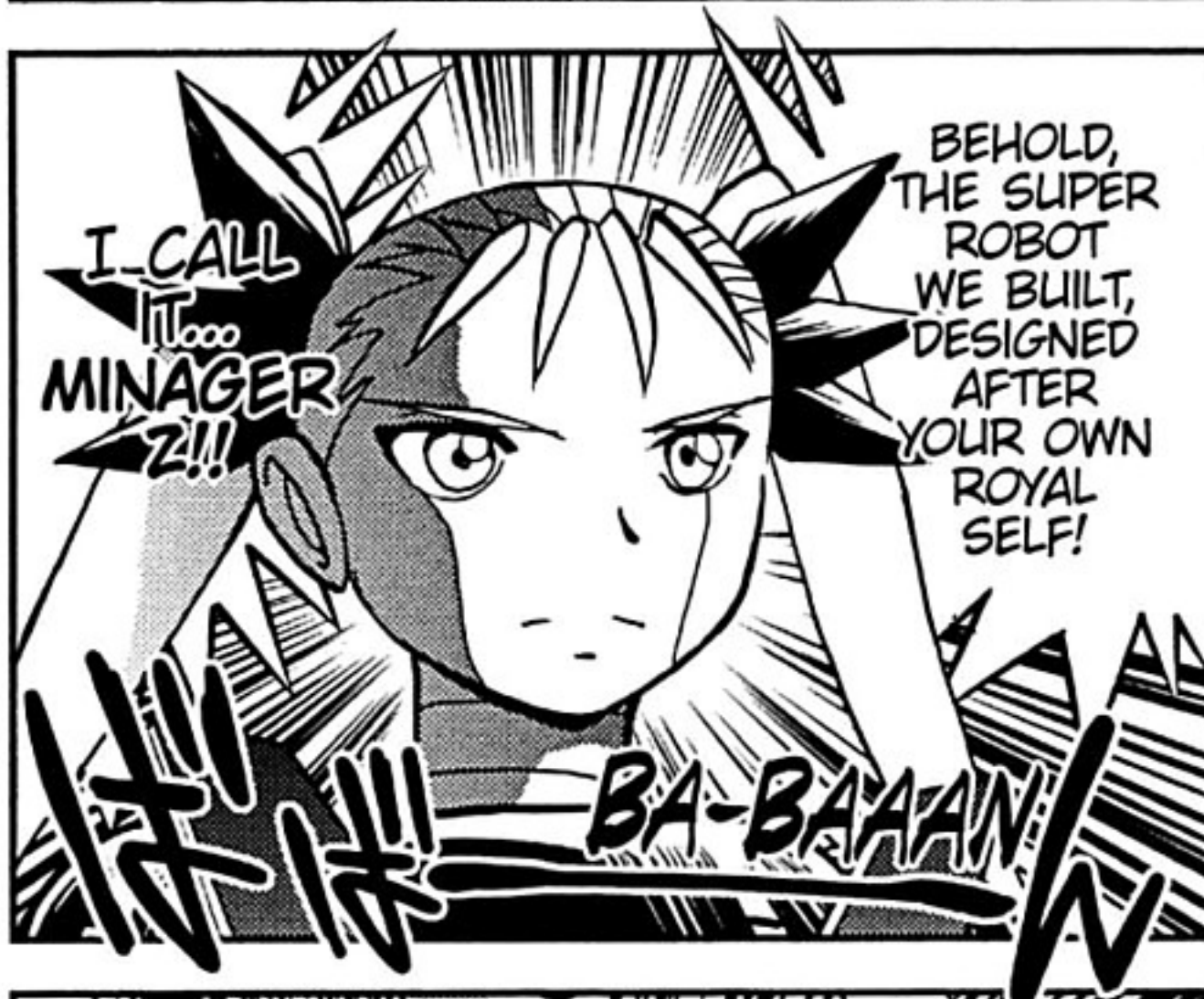
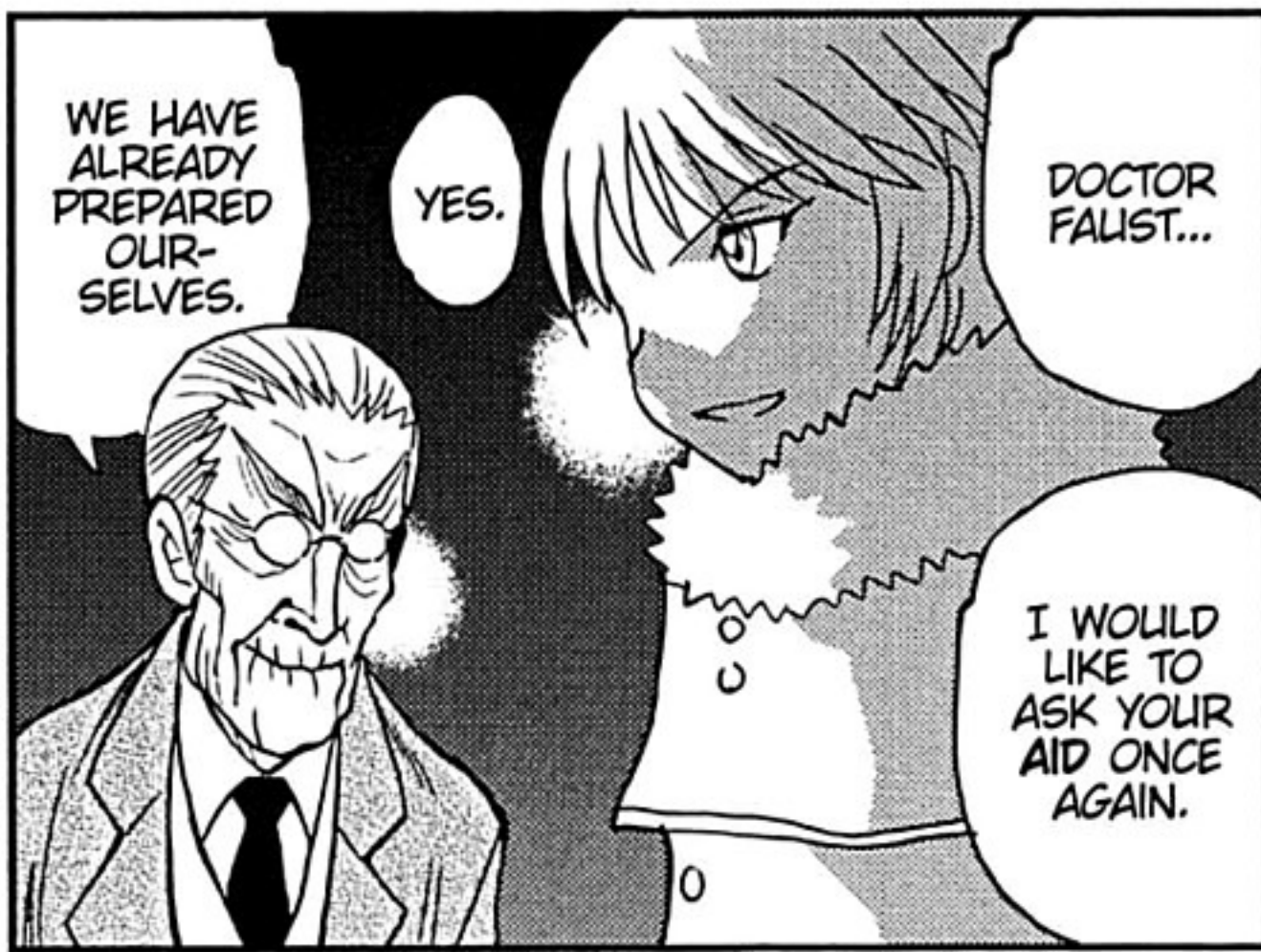
BRING
IT
ON!!

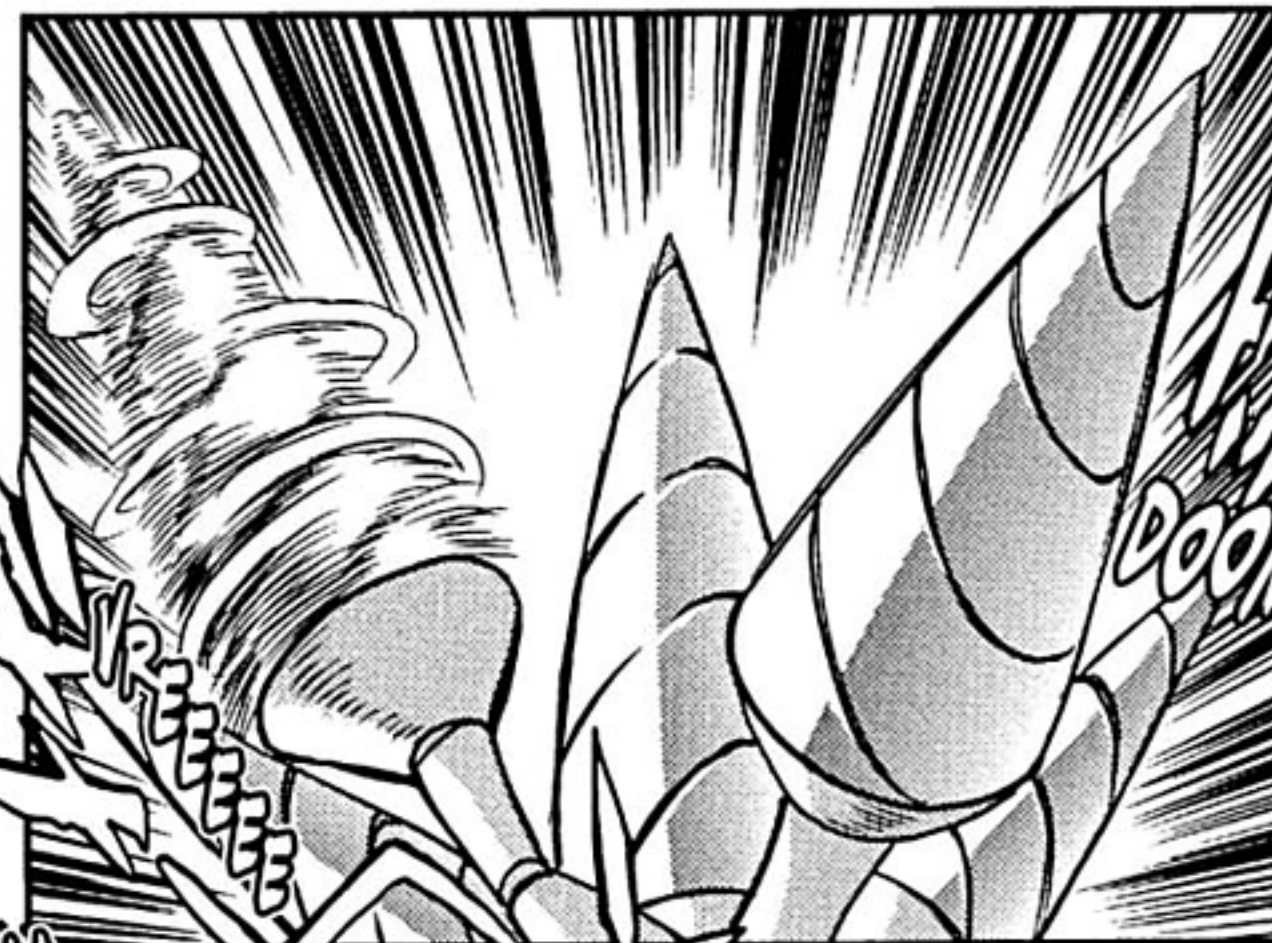
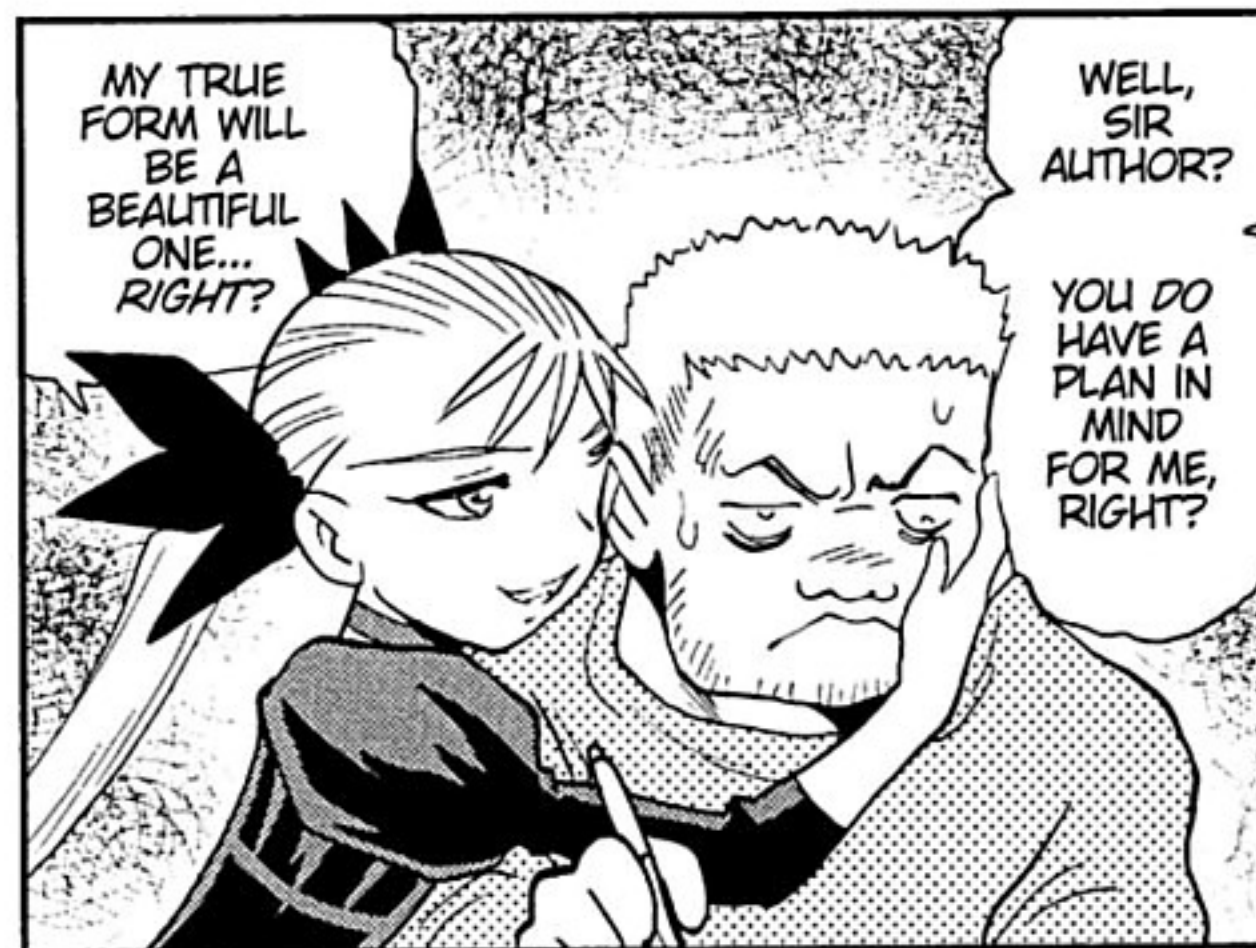
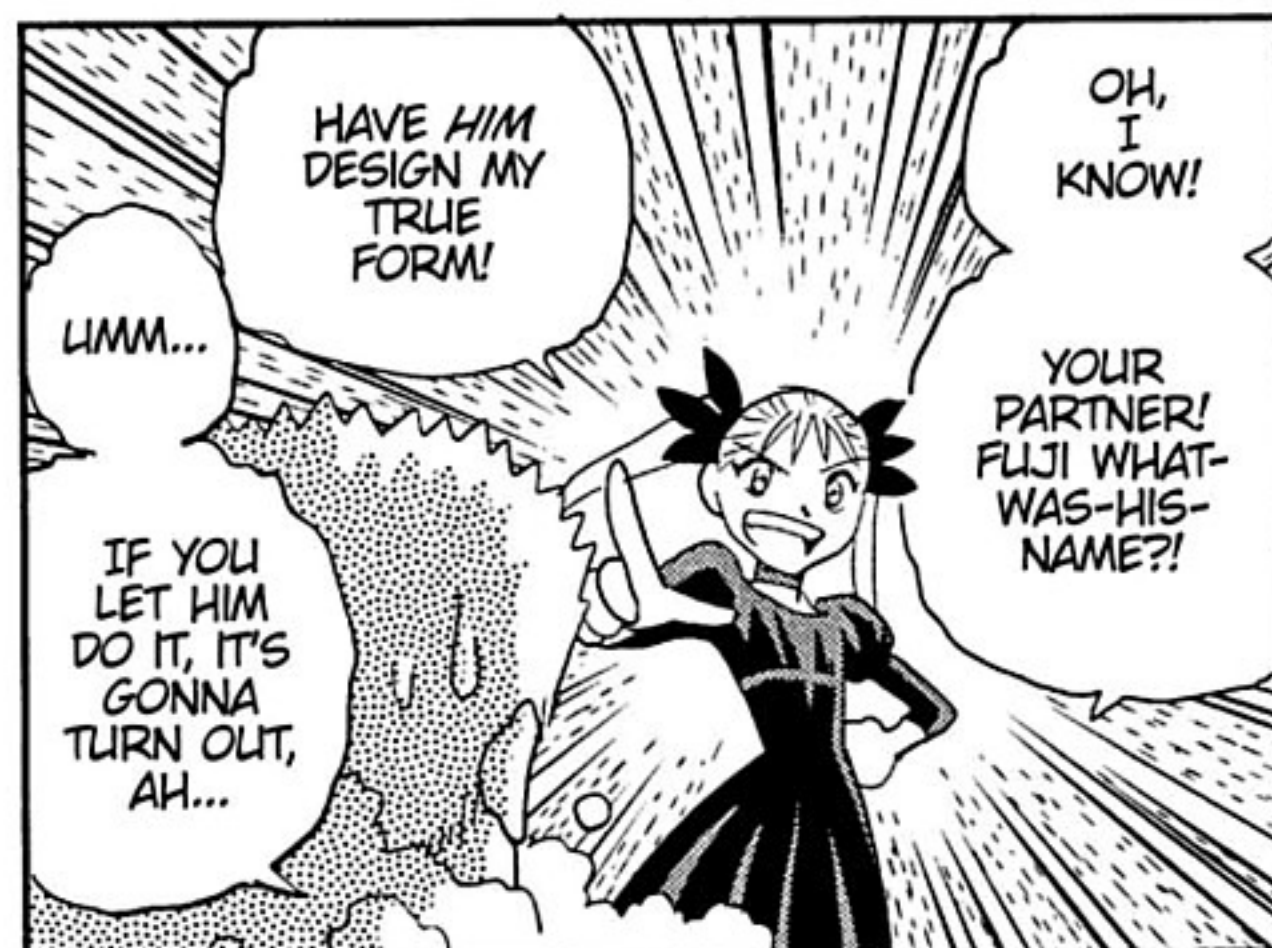
VAM-
PIRE
POWER
!!!

NEXT TIME: MINA'S ROCKET-DRILL BLOODSUCKER KICK MAKES THE (WOLF-)CRAB MEAT FLY!!



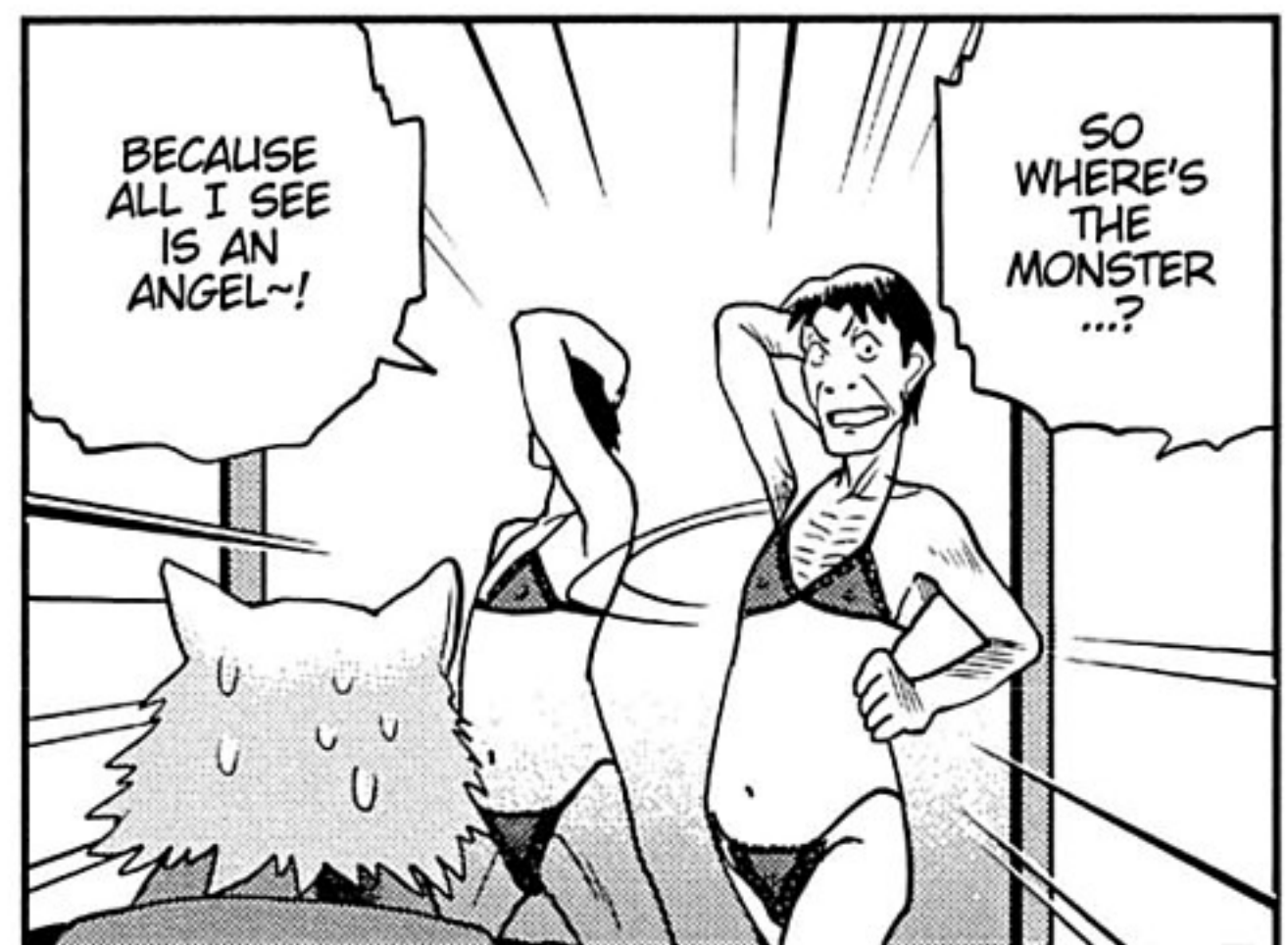
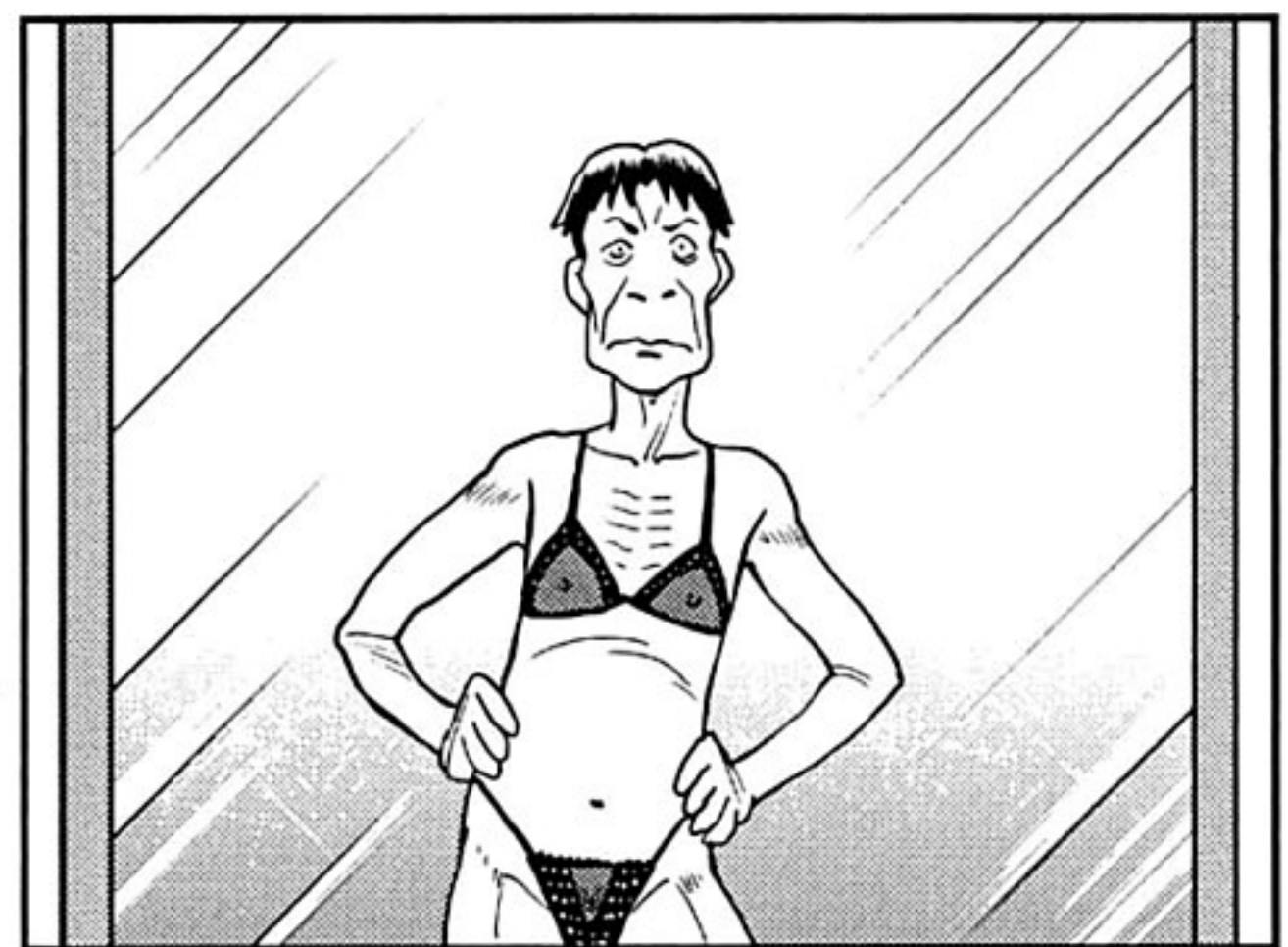
GOOD LUCK, AKIRA-KUN!! TRANSFORM!!

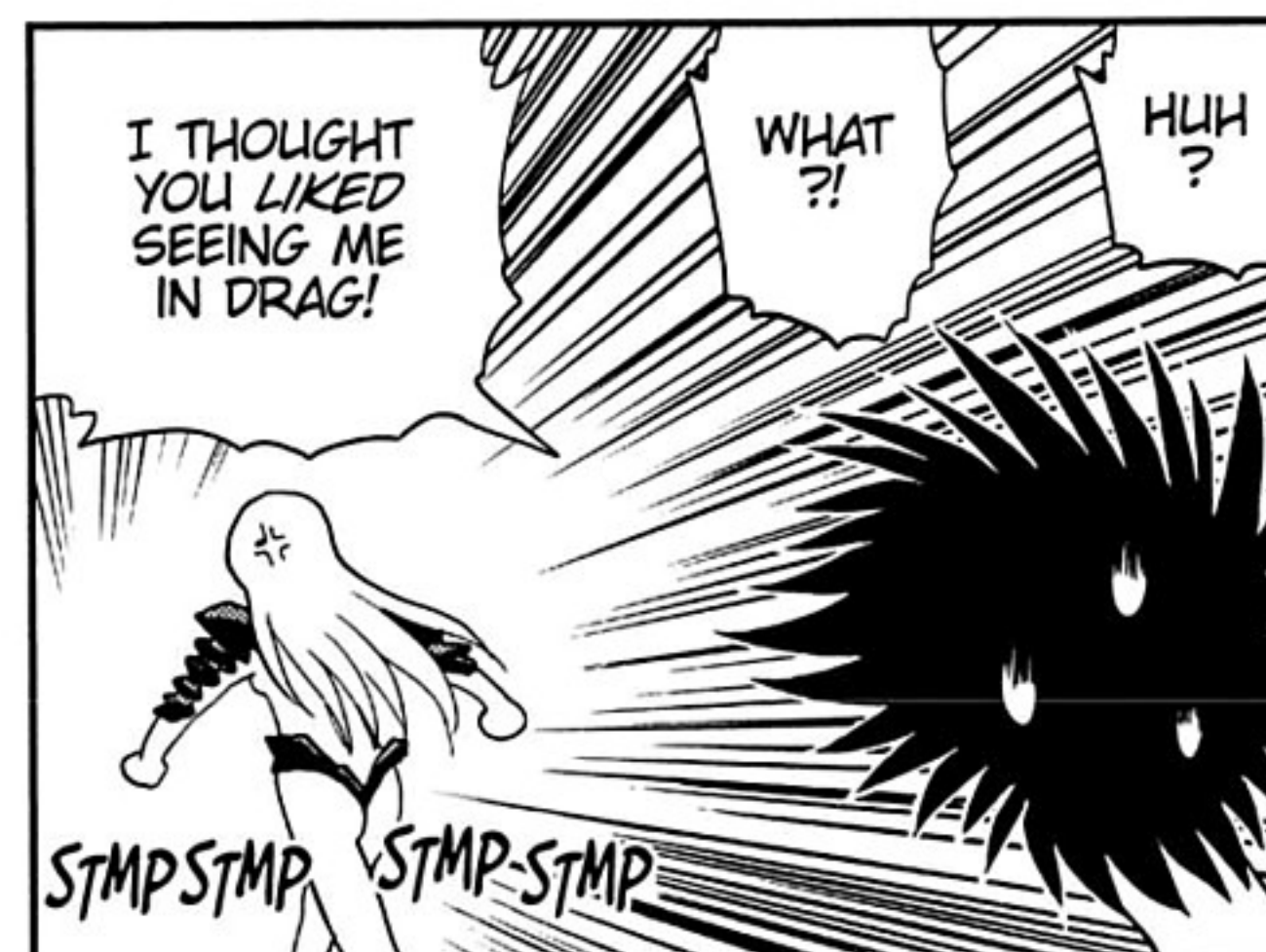
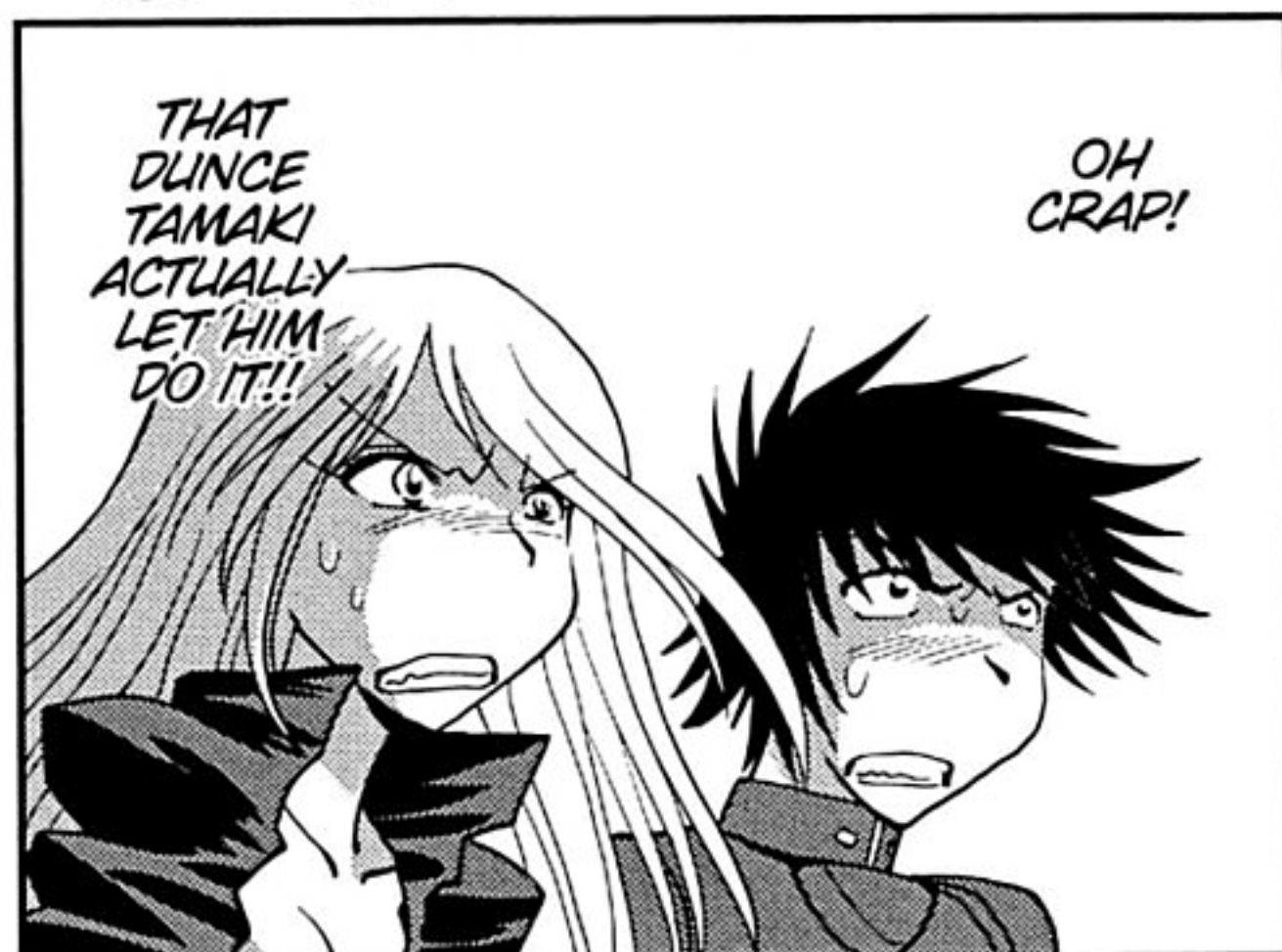




Next episode: "Wings of crimson, Minager 2!!" Don't miss it!

GOOD LUCK, AKIRA-KUN!! PICTURE SHOW

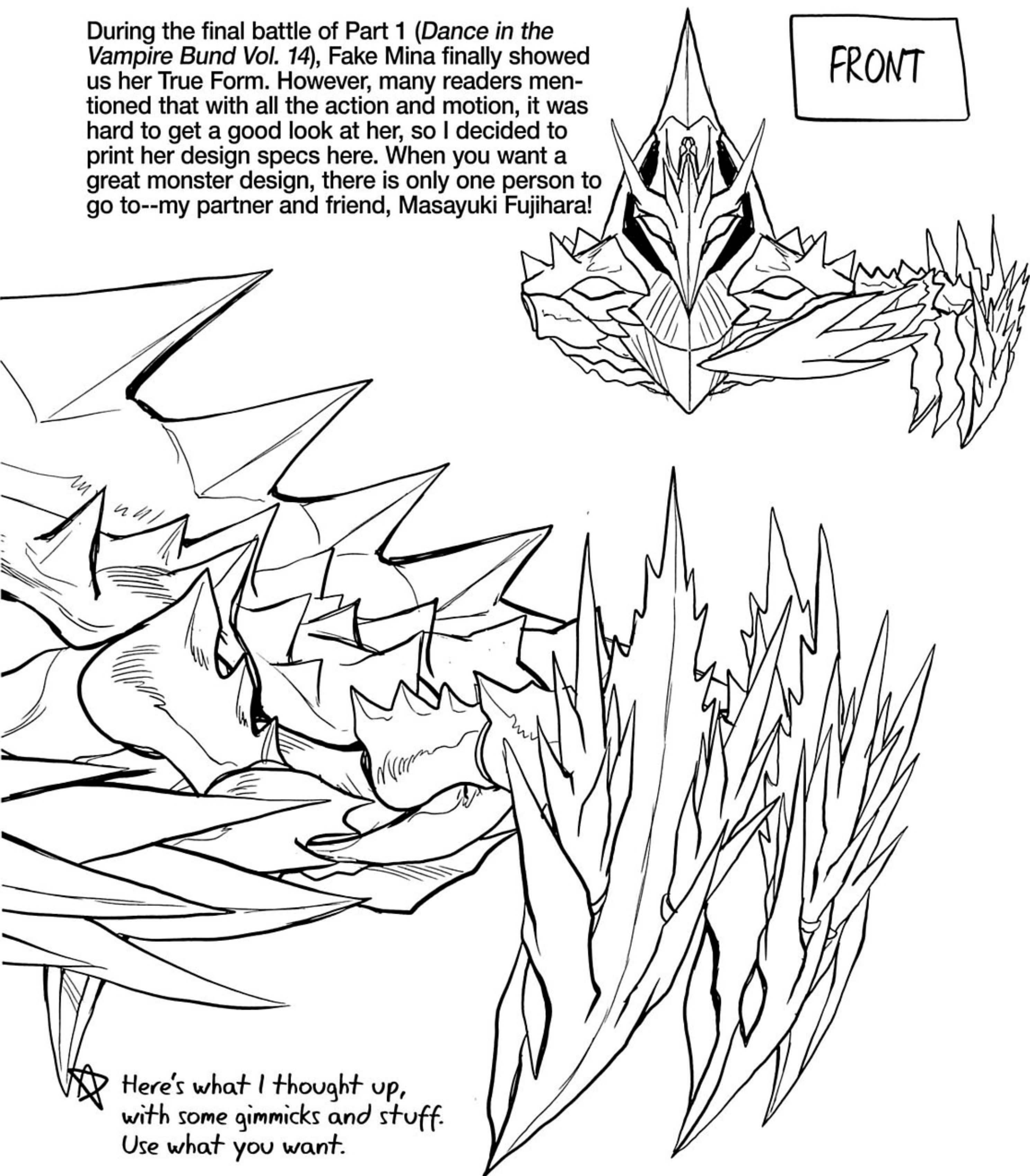




MASAYUKI FUJIHARA FAKE MINA'S TRUE FORM DESIGN

During the final battle of Part 1 (*Dance in the Vampire Bund Vol. 14*), Fake Mina finally showed us her True Form. However, many readers mentioned that with all the action and motion, it was hard to get a good look at her, so I decided to print her design specs here. When you want a great monster design, there is only one person to go to--my partner and friend, Masayuki Fujihara!

FRONT



☆ Here's what I thought up,
with some gimmicks and stuff.
Use what you want.

ABOVE

SIDE

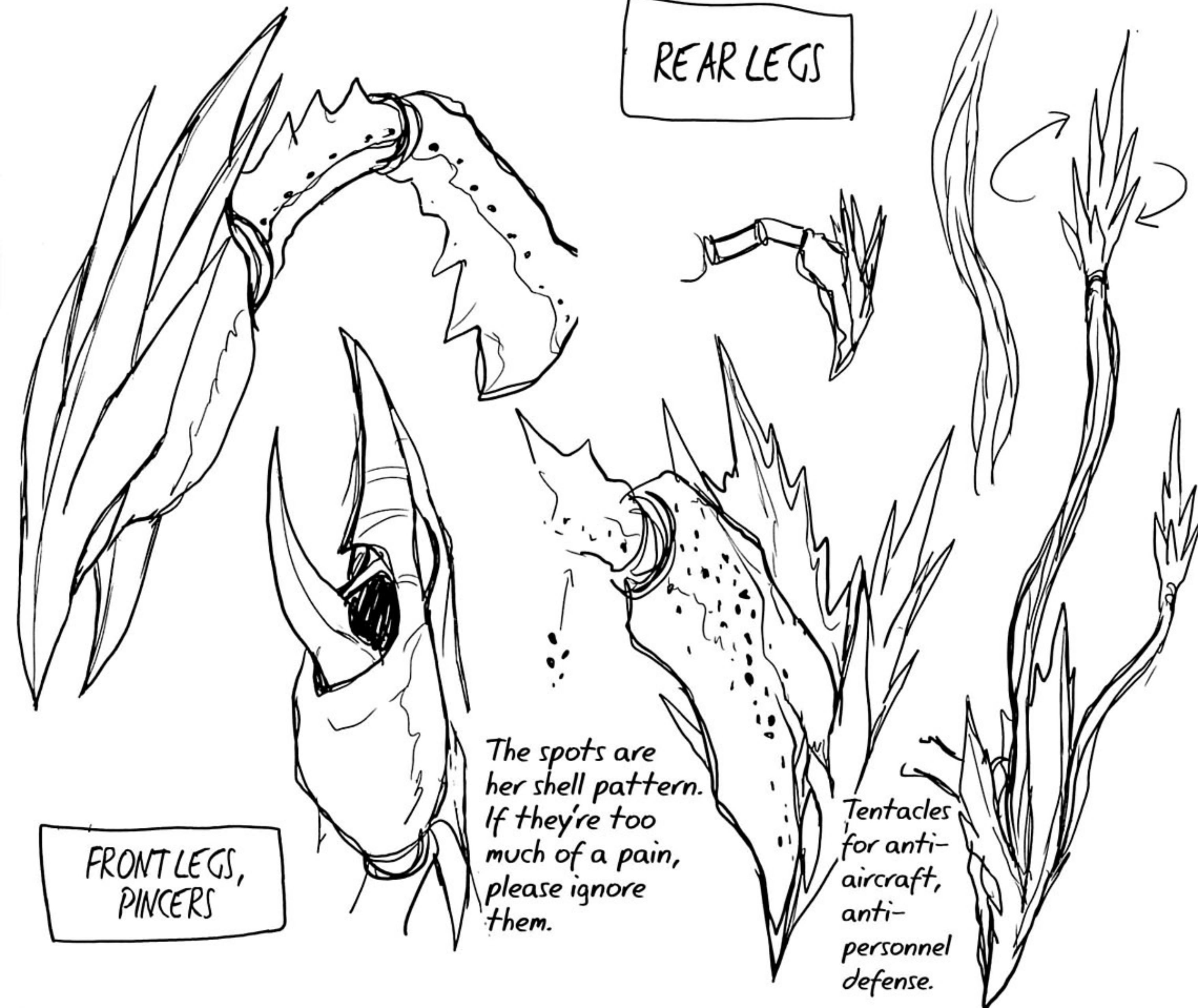


Attacks using enormous pincers and tentacles. Shell is thick enough to deflect shots from even a tank's main cannon. Moves far more quickly than size would indicate. All this makes her True Form one of the most powerful battle-oriented forms of all vampires.



Spines that sting and spin in a corkscrewing stab motion.

REAR LEGS



FRONT LEGS,
PINCERS

The spots are
her shell pattern.
If they're too
much of a pain,
please ignore
them.

Tentacles
for anti-
aircraft,
anti-
personnel
defense.

CRAB QUEEN'S THRONE

Located in the upper, moveable portion.
When she pinches an enemy in her claws,
she can look down on them like she's
straddling them.



Swords on
both left
and right
sides.

I'm a fan of Fake Mina. No matter how many despicable things she has done, it's hard for me to hate her--maybe for the strangely endearing reason that her True Form is an enormous mutant crab.

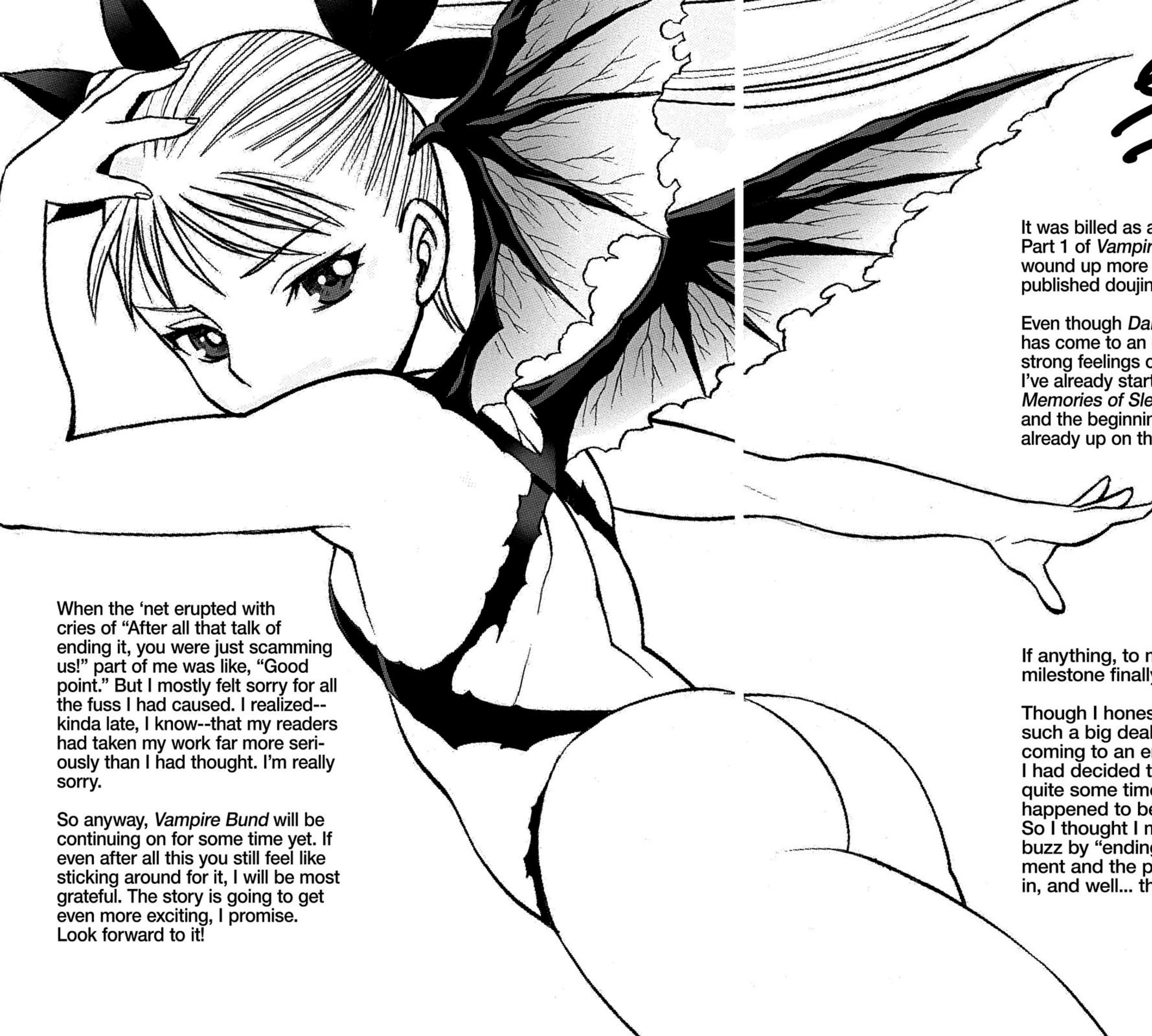
I once asked Tamaki-san, "So why'd you make her a crab?" His answer was an evasive one, "Because, well... y'know... reasons." Now, *Vampire Bund* is known for its meticulously created world and densely woven story. I expect the reasons behind her form are all part of a deeply-laid plan that he could not easily explain. I look forward to the day it is finally revealed in the story.

So anyway, here's the design. I tried to make her as spikey, spiny, and vicious as a princess of monster crabs could be. She doesn't have special powers like turning into mist or shooting eye-lasers, but in exchange, she has a pure, intimidating presence and raw physical power. Tamaki-san said many kind words about the design to me. What do you readers think?

Still, being asked to do designs for the enemy characters has given me some sympathy for them. When I read the story, I was all like, "Hurry up and rip that stupid wolf-boy in half, Hime!" But annoyingly enough, Akira managed to throw her into a wall, ending the bout in a not-quite-draw, but a not-quite-loss either. Next time my crab princess makes an appearance, I'm hoping it's on a grand, Bund-destroying scale!

As an appropriate power-up for that scenario, I'm going to suggest outfitting her with enormous drills (*laugh*).

Masayuki Fujihara



環王
NOZOMU TAMAKI

It was billed as a commemoration of the end of Part 1 of *Vampire Bund*, but actually this volume wound up more of a celebration of the 10th published doujinshi. How did you like it?

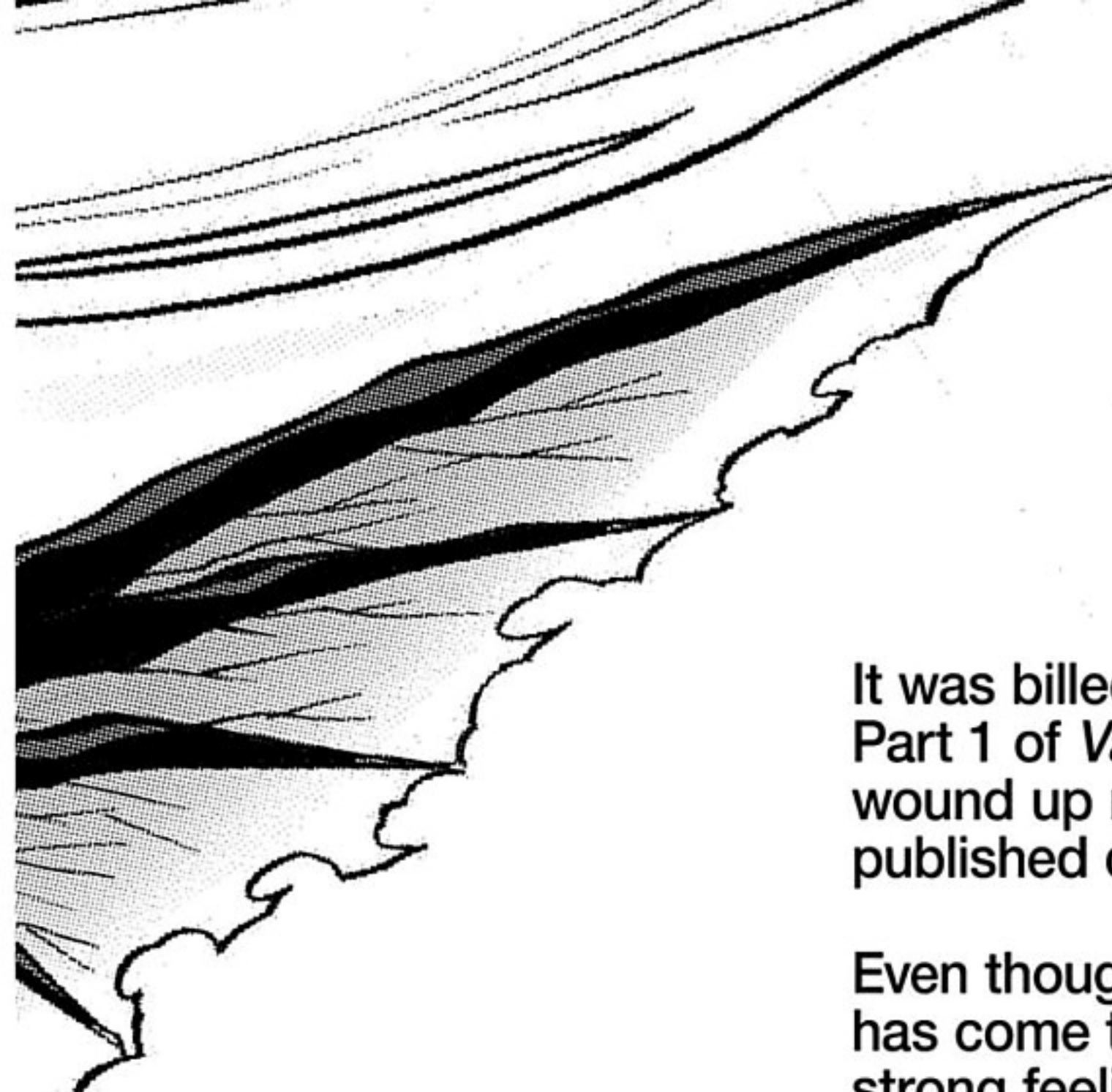
Even though *Dance in the Vampire Bund* Part 1 has come to an end, I don't have any particularly strong feelings on it either way (laugh). I mean, I've already started the bridge story, *The Memories of Sledgehammer*, in *Comics Flapper*, and the beginning of *Dive in the Vampire Bund* is already up on the web's Pixiv Comics.

When the 'net erupted with cries of "After all that talk of ending it, you were just scamming us!" part of me was like, "Good point." But I mostly felt sorry for all the fuss I had caused. I realized--kinda late, I know--that my readers had taken my work far more seriously than I had thought. I'm really sorry.

So anyway, *Vampire Bund* will be continuing on for some time yet. If even after all this you still feel like sticking around for it, I will be most grateful. The story is going to get even more exciting, I promise. Look forward to it!

If anything, to me it's mostly a feeling of a milestone finally reached.

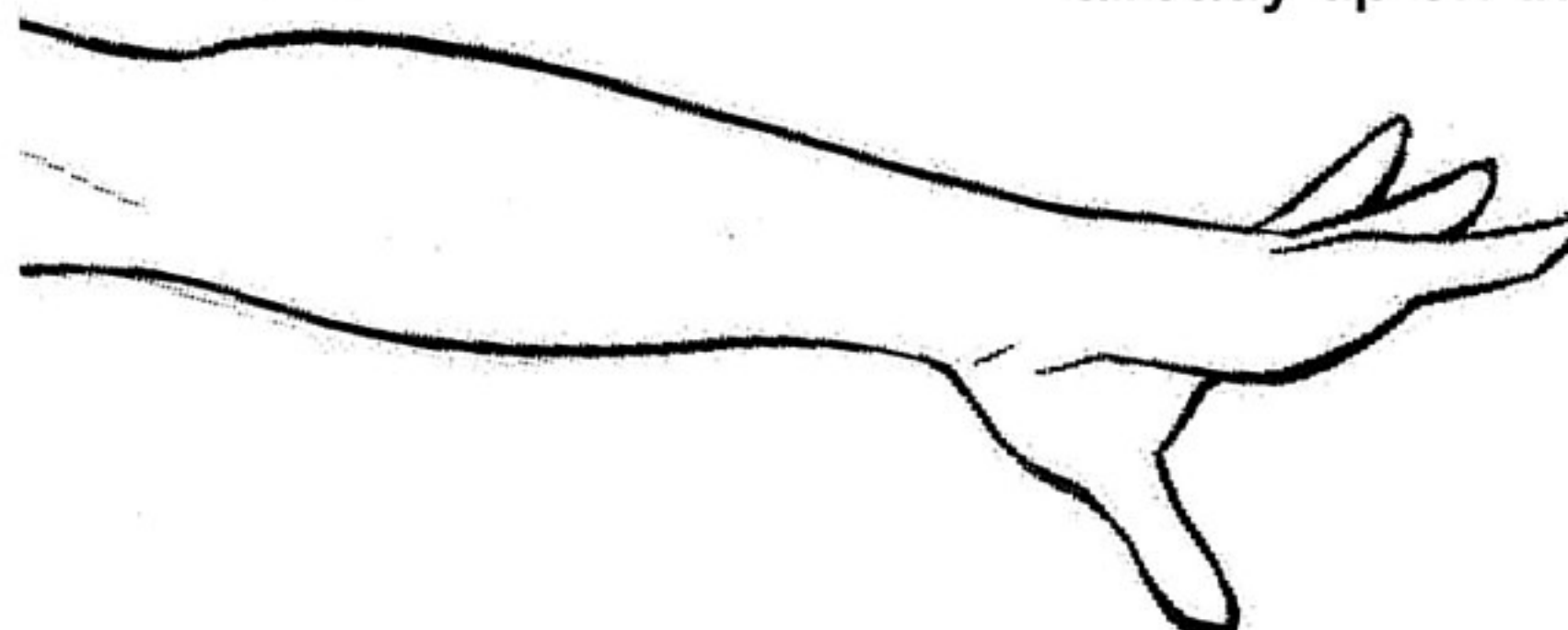
Though I honestly didn't expect there to be such a big deal made about *Vampire Bund* coming to an end after seven years! I had decided to make it a two-part story quite some time earlier, and Volume 14 just happened to be the best point to split it. So I thought I might as well generate a little buzz by "ending" Part 1. But then management and the publishers stuck their fingers in, and well... that's another story.



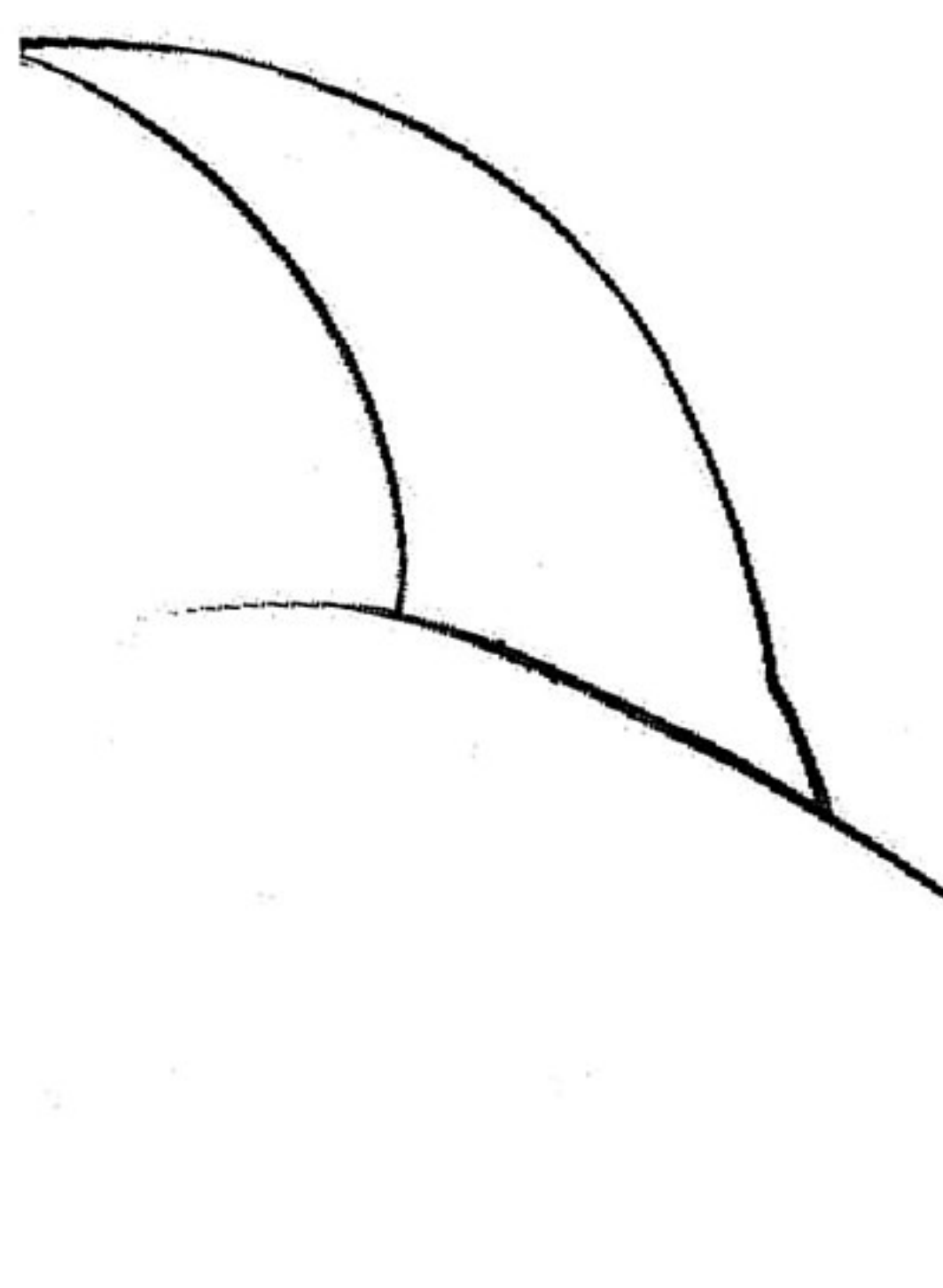
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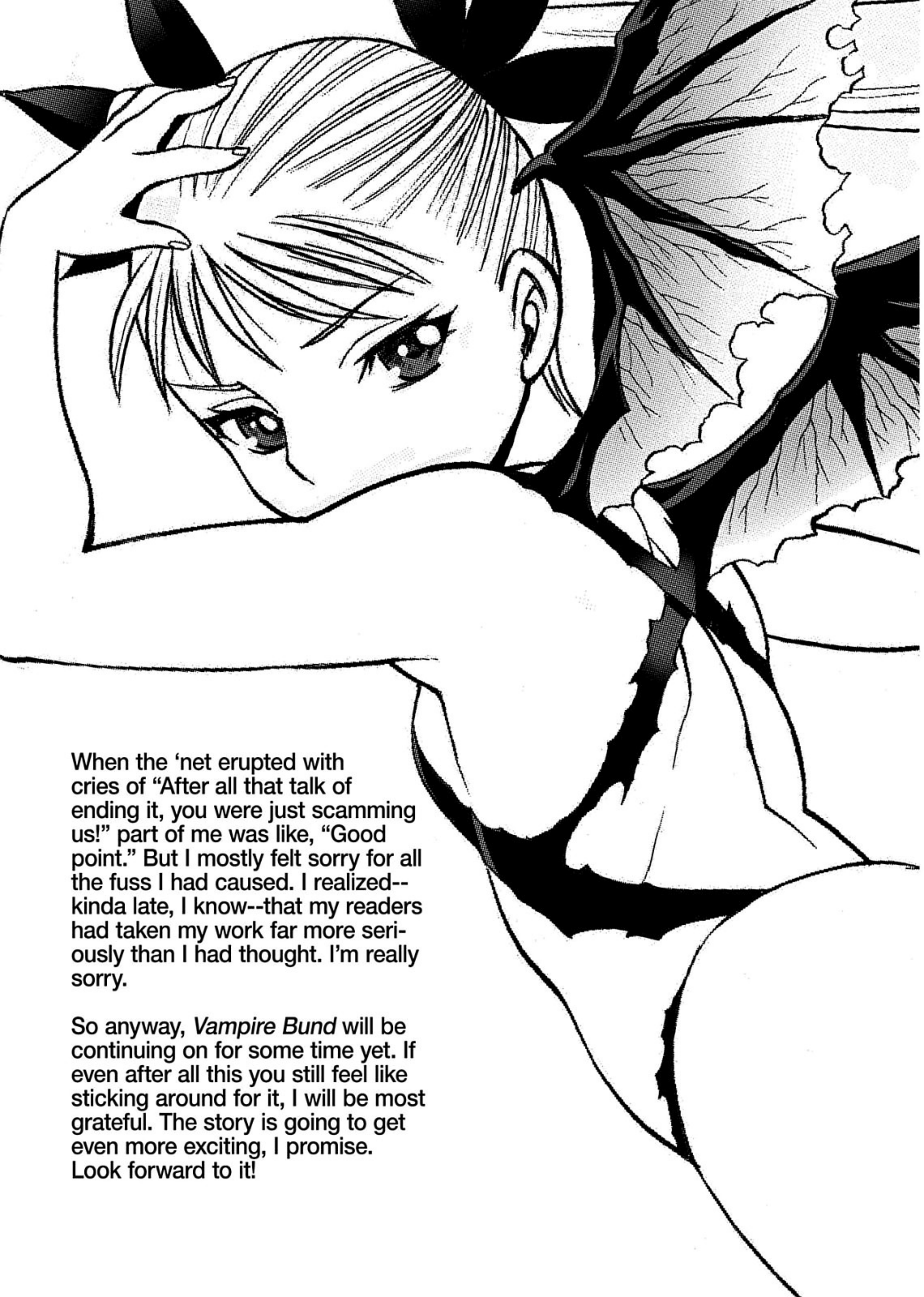
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I found this old illustration when I was packing things up for my 2011 move. I drew it for a meeting with my editors, way back when *Vampire Bund* was still in the planning stages. That makes it the very first drawing of Mina and Akira.

—Nozomu Tamaki

Dance in the
Wampire **B**und

COVER GALLERY



DOUJINSHI
1-10

ダンスインザヴァンパイアバンド
アニメ化記念同人誌

FEVER DREAM



ダンスインザヴァンパイアバンド
TVアニメ放映記念同人誌

THEY THIRST

SAVE THE
LAST DANCE
FOR ME





BLOOD MUSIC



LET THE RIGHT

ONE IN



No Different Flesh



Tweet of



Beehive

Pavane pour l'infante vivante

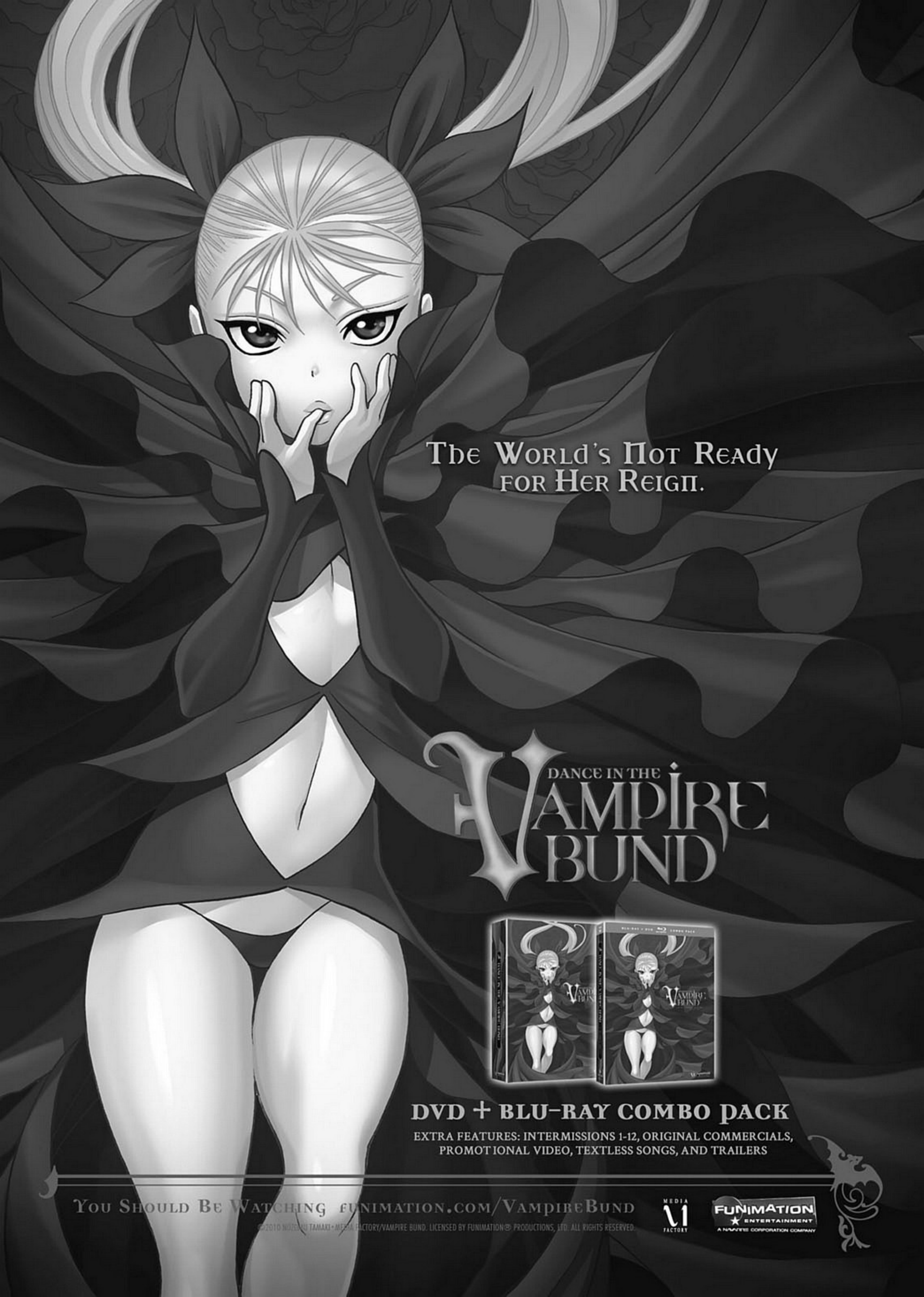
～生ける王女のためのパヴァーヌ～



...Must Come To An End



Dance in the
Vampire Bund



The World's Not Ready
FOR HER REIGN.

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